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MEMOIRS OF A PEERESS,

OR

The Days of Fox.

BY

MRS. GORE.

Catherine Grace Frances (Moody) Gore

A NEW EDITION,

REVISED BY THE AUTHOR.



LONDON:

KNIGHT & SON, CLERKENWELL CLOSE.

—
1859.

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G 66^{me} PREFACE.

THE lapse of a quarter of a century since the first publication of the "Memoirs of a Peeress, or the Days of Fox," has converted much that was then tradition, into sober and substantial history. At the period in question, no authentic memoirs of Charles James Fox,—of the House of Russell,—of the Marquis of Rockingham,—of Burke or Selwyn,—had seen the light; and the greater portion of the Memoirs and Letters of Horace Walpole was still unpublished. It was consequently far easier then, than now, to enlist the interest of the public in pages purporting to pourtray, with some degree of accuracy, the state of morals and manners in England at the close of the last century.

At Paris, where I was residing, a similar attempt had been successfully made, by Monsieur de Courchamps, in his fictitious "Mémoires de la Marquise de Créquy;" and my "Memoirs of a Peeress" were subsequently ratified by the approval of several of my friends who had been intimate with the great statesman. Among others, the Dowager Lady Cork was greatly amused by the part she was made to play as the "Mary Monckton" of my story. The late Lady Holland, though she disliked the book, admitted its perfect accuracy. But it was from my cousin, godfather, and preceptor, Sir Charles Wentworth, who, as the inmate of Lord Fitzwilliam and his private secretary when in office, was familiarly acquainted with the great Whig statesman, that I imbibed my deep veneration for his memory. For Sir Charles was painted, by Richter, immediately after the decease of Mr. Fox, the allegorical portrait, supposed to

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present the most striking likeness of him, now in the possession of Lord Fitzwilliam.

Experience has convinced me that the strictures of my friends Lord and Lady Holland were just; and that nothing can be more objectionable than the introduction of real characters into a work of fiction;—confusing the mind of the young or careless reader, and creating a semi-vitality, half flesh, half marble, like that of the Prince in the Arabian Tale.

The “Memoirs of a Peeress” have been frequently attributed, in library catalogues, to the pen of Lady Charlotte Bury; and a French translation has lately appeared under the title of “*Mémoires d'une Pairesse, par Lady Bury.*” This error is the consequence of her Ladyship’s name having been placed by Mr. Colburn on the title-page of the first edition, as “Editress;” an arrangement made during my residence on the Continent, to which I strongly objected. Lady Charlotte Bury, however, was not permitted to see the MS., or make the slightest alteration in its contents; adding only two short notes, which I have removed from the present edition. I have reason to believe that, like many other readers, she was induced to believe the work the genuine autobiography of a person deceased.

The copyright having fallen into fresh hands, I gladly take the opportunity of a new edition to appropriate to myself, during the lifetime of her Ladyship, the maternity of a favourite literary offspring; as well as to remark that at the time the book was written, (in the reign of William IV.,) the title of Prince of Wales having become temporarily extinct and fallen into desuetude, did not seem to retain, what it has since regained, a claim to public and personal deference.

C. F. G.

LINWOOD,
September, 1858.

MEMOIRS OF A PEERESS.

CHAPTER I.

IT is a melancholy fact, that people seldom set about the task of recollecting till their memory begins to fail. Autobiographies are usually an act of dotage, attempted when the evening of life renders us dull and drowsy; and Death, in prognosticating to Mrs. Thrale's "Old Dobson," as warnings of his end, lameness, deafness, and blindness, omitted the surest of all—prosiness,—the moral origin of most self-edited memoirs.

The other day, accordingly, when I detected my grand-niece, Lady Susan, yawning at an anecdote which I fancied I was relating with more than ordinary piquancy, I said to myself, "I am growing tedious,—I am repeating myself. Now or never, I must write my memoirs. Before I dwindle into imbecility, let me bequeath a word to the wise of the coming generation; lest they pique themselves on too vast an improvement on the wisdom of their ancestors."

"Truth," say the philosophers, "is not to be told at all times." But told it surely ought to be in times like the present; when the world is learning to spell, in order that it may teach to read.

I was born of what is called a good family, in one of the midland counties of England. We were great people in our own parish,—greater in our own estimation. I recollect believing my father to be one of the most important personages in England. Yet he wrote himself a simple Esquire, and his rent-roll scarcely exceeded two thousand per annum. Fortunes have wonderfully

increased of late years. Great Britain, which, like some grey-bearded Jew, buys and sells with the whole universe, a gainer by every bargain, has incalculable hoards in her odd holes and corners,—old stockings, and weasel-skin purses.

Seventy years ago, however, my father, Squire Mordaunt of Spetchingley, was the first man in his neighbourhood. My birth, the date of which, thanks to the irregularities of parish-registry in England, will never be exactly ascertained, occurred about four years after that of his late Majesty. One of my earliest impressions is that of royal popularity—the God-save-great-George-our-Kingism, now verging into oblivion. This proves that I must have speedily followed the Prince of Wales into the world; for, within a few years of their union, the young king and queen, so warmly welcomed on their accession, were “sailing in the North” of national favour. High as politics have run in later days, never did the Hecate of the civilised world weave her spells with blacker influence than during my childhood. The country squirehood of the times of Wilkes and Liberty perpetuated the youth of their political squabbles by magic baths of fiery port; toasting, where now they argue. The “True Briton” was drunk (dead drunk) at my father’s table, till the names of Whig or Tory seemed synonymous with sot.

At my father’s table, however, the port was claret, and excess (at any other suggestion than that of politics) studiously discouraged; for the gentility of the Mordaunts of Spetchingley had been exalted by aristocratic alliance. My mother, Lady Betty Mordaunt, was a daughter of the Earl of Rawborne, who, with half a dozen others to dispose of, was forced to mark his moderate estimation of the gift, by bestowing her hand on a Leicestershire squire. My mother readily forgave the injury; for she was a thoroughly good soul, who lived only for the benefit of her house and home, her husband and children. Her education had been of the limited nature usually bestowed in those days on the superabounding daughters of a needy Scottish earl. She knew only that which she had heard or seen. Even “a *little* learning” was a peril she had never encountered.

I had two sisters and a brother younger than myself—

two brothers, older. We were a happy family. Our childhood, with the exception of the spring-physic suggested by Lansberg's Almanack to nurse and groom, was rarely visited by a dose; and our school-room was untormented with backboards. My father provided us with ponies to scamper over the park; my mother, with a governess not likely to put her own ignorance to shame. The squire called us "the girls," Lady Betty "the young ladies;" and so we grew up in peace and simplicity, till, in my sixteenth year, I was fated to weep over the death-bed of my excellent mother.

This affliction made a woman of me at once. In her dying moments, my mother, calling me to her side, bade me watch over Jane and Helen, and be a comfort to my father. And so I trust I was. From the week succeeding his bereavement, his first care, when he entered the hall on his return from hunting, was to call aloud for "Lizzy." I was never called "Betty" again at Spetchingley after the death of my mother. For every one loved her;—husband, children, servants, poor. Brilliant qualities or dazzling talents have far less hold on the affections of our fellow-creatures than kindness and mercy.

Very soon after the decease of Lady Betty, however, Squire Mordaunt became once more every inch a squire. The claret was once more port, and every glass a bumper. But for the conviviality, indeed, with which he rendered Spetchingley attractive to his neighbours, the dulness of his life might have become insupportable; for my brothers were away at college, and Jane and Helen still children. At length, in the midst of politics and potations, some officious brother-squire suggested that, Miss Elizabeth being too young to assume the head of his house, he had best pluck up his courage, take another wife, and be a man again.

The advice came late. He had been already three weeks married; and the only courage he wanted was to announce to his daughters that he had selected their governess to be Mrs. Mordaunt of Spetchingley!

When at last the secret was unfolded, I was too much surprised to display much displeasure. But step-mothers have a prescriptive claim to detestation; and I soon

learned from the old nurse and housekeeper who had looked forward to my lax rule over the establishment, that mine was a monster. The usual consequences ensued. I became rebellious, and incited others to rebellion. My brothers wrote insulting letters,—my sisters and myself exhibited a most unfilial disrespect towards the intruder; till we rendered my father miserable, and Mrs. Mordaunt resentful.

She had prepared herself, I verily believe, for kindness and moderation. But we would not hear of being well-used. We insisted on having a tyrant, and a tyrant we had. No more ponies, no more indulgence; but abundance of grammar and history, to wreak the school-room vengeance of the governess-squress.

One day, some six months after the avowal of his clandestine marriage, my father called for me, according to his old custom, on his return from hunting. But I was sullen, and scorned to reply. I had taken refuge, as I always did when offended, in my mother's dressing-room; in which, as it had remained untouched since the death of Lady Betty, my step-mother never presumed to make her appearance. There was something in its cold, glazed, unoccupied neatness painful to the eye, and in unhappy accordance with my temper of mind when disposed to resist the authority of my father's wife.

On the present occasion, to my great surprise, my father pursued me to my sacred retreat. But he was too much excited by the object of his interview, to notice my perversity.

“Lizzy,” said he, “I wish you joy. You have an opportunity of making an excellent match. This morning, as I was riding to cover, Sir Robert Warley made proposals for your hand.”

“Sir Robert Warley?”

“Sir Robert Warley of Speen Park. His father kept the famous Speenham hounds.”

“Did I ever see him?”

“Did you ever!—Why, he spent three days at Spetchingley, last Christmas was a twelvemonth; and you sat betwixt him and Dick Mordaunt at dinner the day the Winningtons dined here.”

“Yes, I remember him now.”

“Six thousand a-year good, and heir to Sir Richard Winnington.—He will ride over to breakfast to-morrow.”

“Better spare him the trouble,” said I, coldly.

“The *trouble*?”

“By writing him word, sir, that it is out of my power to accept his offer.”

“The deuce it is!—And why, pray?”

“Because I consider him ill-mannered, ill-tempered, and ill-looking.”

My father, who had drawn me to the window-seat to make his communication, jumped up when I delivered this decided verdict; and having clapped his hat on his head and uttered some unintelligible words—of which I could only distinguish—“Sophy always said she was a queer one; I must go and consult Mrs. Mordaunt,”—quitted the room.

When we met again at dinner I had added two inches to my stature; not by the refusal of the baronet, but by the opportunity of proving to my ex-governess that I had a will of my own. There was, however, a personage at Spetchingley more disagreeable to me, if possible, than Mrs. Mordaunt; a poor relation and hanger-on of my father, who like him rode hard and drank hard, when he could ride and drink at the expense of other people. Dick Mordaunt, who had been called in his youth a “deuced good fellow,” was now in his middle age called a “deuced knowing one;” and this knowingness was in my eyes an inexpiable offence. The creature affected a significant saucy laugh whenever women were spoken of, for which I could have killed him; and, on the day of my accession of dignity, having caught his eye as I sat bridling with importance, he burst into a fit of laughter which provoked me into a fit of tears. Dick Mordaunt and my step-mother, united, were certainly enough to drive a less positive damsel into the arms of a Sir Robert Warley.

Apparently, they were not very ardently extended to receive me; for after one more appeal to my better judgment in favour of Speen Park, my father signified my negative; and, some months afterwards, the daughter of a neighbouring squire was elevated to the dignity of

“Lady Warley.” Meanwhile, the mere offer had excited a thousand vagaries in my mind. Since I had made so important a conquest, I began to fancy I must be a pretty girl, and to fear that, with a father immersed in country-squirehood, and a step-mother suffering under the scorn and exclusion of the high-mightinesses of the county, my first adorer might prove my last. My seventeenth birthday found me in despair; for not a word was heard in the family of my “coming out.” My brothers declined passing their college vacations at Spetchingley, so that I had no one to whom to confide my misgivings. Jane and Helen were too young for confidantes; and I almost began to believe, what was plainly expressed in the significant glances of Dick Mordaunt,—“Miss Lizzy, you were a fool to refuse a good offer. The chances are that you will never get another.”

But, in the midst of these evil auguries, my father called for me, once more, with an open letter in his hand.—Another proposal!—not from a rich young baronet but from a poor old aunt.

CHAPTER II.

SPETCHINGLEY, I fancy, sang for joy when it became known that my mother’s widowed sister, Lady Carleton, was desirous that her eldest niece should become her inmate; my chittish airs having rendered me equally obnoxious to my father’s second wife, and second cousin. Dick Mordaunt laughed outright at the notion of my consorting with the great, and becoming a London lady; while the old servants made evident to the promoted governess their delight at seeing Miss Mordaunt adopted by the family of their late beloved lady,—“their lady who was a lady-born.”

But, great as was the general satisfaction, mine was still greater. A whole night after my father’s acceptance of Lady Carleton’s proposal did I lie awake, revolving

in my mind visions of stars and garters, balls and masquerades. Though a simple country girl, an odd volume of Sir Charles Grandison, included among the literary treasures of the housekeeper's room, had roused those latent instincts which long ago induced the poetical moralist to declare that

Men, some to pleasure, some to business take,
While every woman is at heart a rake.

Since the courtship of Sir Robert, I had considered myself a Harriet Byron, and he, my Greville; and I doubted not that legions of Pollexfens and Grandisons were waiting my arrival in town, to become the bane and antidote of my matrimonial destinies.

Of Lady Carleton, my notions were vague and inconclusive. I remembered that divers of my mother's family had in my childhood visited Spetchingley; in particular, a certain aunt Clara, a tall meagre ungain creature, whose usual costume was a cravat and riding-habit. But, Lady Carleton's letter, of which my father had left me in possession, was signed "M. Carleton;" and, whatever else she might be, it was clear that Lord Carleton's widow was no Clara. To *me* she was London. The association between my aunt and the metropolis was at present too close to be disunited.

Much, however, as for the last year I had detested Spetchingley, I found it impossible to leave it without regret. There were my two little sisters to be taken leave of, whom a dying mother had committed to my affection. There was my father; there were the old domestics,—the old walks,—the old avenues,—to all of which, it was painful to say farewell. Even my stepmother seemed to improve at the moment of separation.

"May you enjoy health and happiness, Miss Mordaunt!" said she, taking my hand, when the chaise containing the housekeeper who was to escort me to London appeared at the door. "Evil counsel has created estrangement between us. But, should you ever need protection, you will find a mother in your father's wife."

"God bless you, Lizzy!" added my father, folding me tenderly in his arms. "Be obedient to your aunt Carleton; and, if you can, as good a woman as your mother."

Conscious that I scarcely merited so much forbearance, I was many miles on the London road before my compunctions visitings were at rest. The first thing that attracted my attention from recollections of home, was the lodge-gate of Speen Park. I could not forbear a smile as we passed. I was going where Sir Roberts were “as plenty as blackberries;” and blessed my stars that the world was still before me where to choose. My father had presented me with a purse containing a fifty pound note, and five guineas in gold; and a fine set of pearls belonging to my mother. Ignorant of the value of money, these treasures seemed inexhaustible; and few people have changed horses at Barnet on their first entrance into London, with a more mistaken estimate of their own importance.

I had concluded that Lady Carleton’s residence must be handsome and well situated. But the widows of Irish viscounts are often sadly “small deer,” and I found her living in a shabby house in Jermyn Street. It was winter; and the smoky dingy atmosphere, and mean aspect of my future abode, damped the excitement of my spirits. My aunt, a tall hard-featured woman, curtsied formally on my entrance; and I discovered that I was to find protection instead of kindness, and tea instead of dinner. Lady Carleton’s means were evidently small, or her economy great. Her establishment consisted of a plain waiting-woman, named Phillis, a plainer cook, and a footman in a showy livery. All this differed widely from the old-English-gentleman style of living at Spetchingley; and still more different was the shabby chilly attic in which I was installed, from my airy chamber at home, with its blazing fire and ample accommodations. I rejoiced that the proud old housekeeper had taken leave, and departed on a visit to her relations, so as not to witness the meagreness of Lady Carleton’s hospitality.

Still, it was London:—in Jermyn Street there was no usurping step-mother,—no vulgar Dick Mordaunt. I was coming out,—I was to be presented at court,—I was independent. Next morning, I rose as soon as it was daylight,—such daylight as it was! Lady Carleton did not breakfast till eleven· and the only book I could

discover was an odd volume called the Court Calendar, which at that period I held to be a barren catalogue of names. Before my dilatory relation made her appearance, I was quite sick of my studies, and of London.

“What an object the child is!” was her first remark to Phillis, upon whose arm she was leaning. “Yet my nephew Harry assured me she was a beauty!”

“We must make allowances, my lady, for a countrified miss,” replied Phillis, in a patronising tone. “Let us see what a new corset and Monsieur Rose can do for her, before we decide.”

“WE!”—The waiting-woman then was to be admitted into the conclave to whose decrees I was subjected:—I—Miss Mordaunt of Spetchingley—the daughter of a Lady Betty,—the niece of a Viscountess!

“Pray, child, what are your pursuits?” inquired Lady Carleton, startling me from my reverie, as she sipped her tea. “Are you musical?”

“I am fond of music, but I have never learnt.”

“Do you draw?”

“No, madam.”

“You neither play nor draw?—At least you can dance?”

“I have never had a master——”

“Totally uneducated, I protest!” exclaimed my aunt, turning to Phillis, who waited at breakfast. “My poor sister seems to have strangely neglected her family. I am sure,” she continued, addressing the waiting-woman, but glancing at me, “I don’t know what is to be done with her.”

Lady Carleton’s next inquiry regarded the state of my finances. “The fifty pounds, which was of course intended for your personal expenses, you can give into my charge. The five guineas you may keep for pocket-money, but they must not be foolishly squandered,” observed her ladyship in an authoritative tone; and, during the remainder of that first, dreary, dispiriting day, I was exhibited to visitors and measured by tradesmen, all of whom agreed with my aunt that at present I was not fit to be seen.

Such was the overthrow of the lofty structure my vanity had created!—My “Thrasonical brag,” that I was

to come, see, and conquer, was a delusion:—I was not even considered presentable. But for the recollection of Dick Mordaunt's face, sneering over the park-palings as I drove past, I would have asked leave to return to Spetchingley.

Another week in town, however, and my prospects brightened. Re-equipped, and embellished by the hand of a fashionable coëffeur, even Mrs. Phillis admitted that my brother Henry's laudations were not exaggerated; and my aunt announced her intention of having me presented at court.

It is now just fifty years since, at seventeen, I commenced my study of the world. I have associated in my time with royal, gentle, simple,—the great, the little, and the middling; and have seen each successive epoch produce some temporary idolatry. At one time, saintship is in fashion,—at another, scepticism; at one time, liberalism,—at another, loyalty. At the period I arrived in London, politics were in vogue, and political celebrities the rage. The handsomest man of the day, the richest, the noblest, the young Duke of Ancaster himself, would have been eclipsed the moment either Fox, Burke, or Fitzpatrick appeared in company. Not that then, any more than now, the high priestesses of fashion cared a rush for the country, or its constitution. But the Prince had embarked in a political career. The Prince (THE Prince!) was known to assemble at Carleton House the leading members of the Fox party; and to be a countess, duchess, princess, was nothing if unhonoured by the personal friendship of some eminent party-man.

Lady Carleton was in herself too little distinguished by beauty, wit, or fortune to aspire to this. But she saw *those* who saw *them*; and, at second-hand, we were enabled to enjoy the *bon-mots* of Hare and Sheridan, or the gruff truisms of Thurlow. I had not been a month in town before her house acquired distinction in my eyes, far beyond that of my commodious hospitable home.

I was becoming familiar, too, with the surviving members of my mother's family. There was her brother, the old Earl of Rawborne, (a title enveloped in gout and flannels,—who for any active duties he performed in the

world, might have been for the last ten years a tenant of the family vault,)—a widower, with two sons, Lord Medway and Algernon Rawborne. There was my eldest aunt, Lady Lavinia Shanstone, like Lady Carleton, a widow, but *unlike* Lady Carleton, a *rich* widow, and a saint. Two other sisters of Lady Betty had died unmarried, and one was the wife of a clergyman in the north of England; but of the youngest, the wife of Lord John De Vere, no mention ever escaped the lips of Lady Carleton.

“What has become of my aunt De Vere?” I ventured one day to inquire of my handsome and agreeable cousin, Algernon Rawborne, who had called in Jermyn Street during the absence of the Viscountess. “I never see or hear of her among you.”

“You will never see or hear of her again,” he replied gravely.

“Indeed?”

“Lady John De Vere is no longer in existence.”

“Yet I cannot remember having worn mourning for her?”

“That is a duty still to be performed,” replied Algernon, laughing. “Lady John is metamorphosed, *not* into dust and ashes, but into a personage no less imposing than Duchess of Rochester. Her husband’s elder brother died unmarried last year, within a few months of the death of the duke his father; and the new duchess is still at Paris, wearing off the freshness of her strawberry leaves. We are expecting her every day.”

“I rejoice to hear it. I have often wished to see her.”

“You are presumptuous. The Duchess of Rochester is a person not to be seen for wishing it.”

“But in our own family?”

“*There* least of all, and *here* especially. She always detested Lady Carleton, as clever spoiled children are apt to detest cross elder sisters.”

“In short, I am not likely to have a glimpse of her?”

“Certainly not. You will probably see nothing else!—At Court,—at Almack’s,—at the Opera,—wherever beauty is worshipped, the Duchess shines a never-setting star.”

“You are not very reverent in your allusions.”

“Who cares for the beauty of his aunt, particularly with a cousin still more beautiful? By the way, do you know that you strikingly resemble Lady John? So much the better! *Qui se ressemble, s’assemble!*”—and you would be far happier under *her* roof than in this abominable old—Ha! my dear Lady Carleton, how do you do? I did not hear you enter the room!” said Algernon, discreetly interrupting himself.

“I am quite well, I thank you,” she replied, eyeing us with displeasure in her looks; while Algernon adroitly forestalled her purposed declaration of hostilities, by engaging her to dine in St. James’s Square the following day. For my poor uncle Rawborne, as I had already discovered, loved to have himself and his flannels rolled to the dinner table, and to fancy that himself and his flannels were enjoying the society of his family; and as, during the hunting season, Lord Medway ceded the control of the establishment in St. James’s Square wholly to his brother, Algernon took care that my “poor dear sister Carleton,” and my “poor dear niece Betty Mordaunt,” should very frequently administer to the domestic happiness of the Earl.

In spite of the vigilance of Lady Carleton, Algernon contrived to visit Jermyn Street whenever there was a chance of finding me alone; and a few days after the family dinner party, we had another confidential interview, which confirmed the deep regard I was beginning to entertain for my cousin.

It appeared that a letter had been addressed to the coronet in flannels by his godson, Alfred Mordaunt, my youngest brother, entreating Lord Rawborne’s interest with the Admiralty to procure him a commission; having got into some boyish scrape at Eton, which he did not desire to make known at Spetchingley.

“With an exclusive privilege of franking for my father,” observed Algernon, “I felt entitled to use his name in addressing their lordships in behalf of his godson; and here, my dear coz, is Alfred’s appointment to the Resolute, a first-rate frigate, on the point of sailing for the Mediterranean. I have already communicated on the subject with Mr. Mordaunt, who, I trust, will raise no

objections to my father's proposal of having Alfred in St. James's Square, to be fitted out in a manner becoming his godson."

"All this is the result of your own kind feelings, Mr. Rawborne," said I. "How shall I thank you for my brother?"—

"By calling me 'Algernon,' as a cousin ought," he replied; "and treating me with a little less ceremony."

Nor was this interposition in favour of my wild brother a solitary instance of Algernon's good-will towards us. All he could do to enliven my monotonous mode of life, was done without ostentation.—He procured for Lady Carleton boxes for the play,—the opera; and became our escort whenever the conscientious discharge of his duties in St. James's Square admitted of his quitting his father. But Lady Carleton, though willing to accept dinners, breakfasts, suppers, and opera-boxes, grew uneasy lest they should eventually excite in my bosom a tenderer sentiment than gratitude towards the donor.

"My nephew Algernon walked home with you, then?" she inquired of me, one Sunday morning, when herself indisposed for church. "That young man is here too often. Have a care, child. Algernon Rawborne is no match for you, nor you for *him*."

"Nor has he any inclination for me, madam, I assure you, nor I for him."

"Psha! what should a country miss of eighteen know of the inclinations of a young man of wit and fashion about town?"

"*Is* my cousin Algernon a man of wit and fashion?" said I in a scornful tone, piqued by Lady Carleton's allusion to my rusticity.

"On such points, Miss Mordaunt, bow to the authority of those more experienced than yourself. Algernon is a charming fellow, but he cannot afford to marry. My brother, Rawborne, as you may have heard, was born one of the poorest of his Order. On succeeding at fifty years of age to his title, he was weak in mind, ordinary in person; too limited in income to reside at his family place,—too limited in abilities to augment it by professional or official distinctions. Under these difficulties,

foolish as he was supposed to be, Lord Rawborne found wit enough for the wisest resolution in the world. By marrying an heiress, he obtained the weight of his coronet in Bank Stock. We, his sisters, were too discreet to inquire whence she came.—Whither she went, was no secret in the family. The countess scarcely survived three years. After giving birth to two sons, she slept with our forefathers; bequeathing to my brother the hoardings of her own.”

“ By her death, then, Lord Rawborne became rich?”

“ Immensely!—So possessed, however, was his narrow mind with an impression of the humiliations inseparable from an impoverished peerage, that on his marriage with Miss Moses—Joses—Samuel—Levi,— (I forget the woman’s name!)—he allowed her fortune to be entailed with the title, without a shilling of provision for younger children; so that, had it not pleased Providence to remove Lady Rawborne, we might have had another brood of beggars, bearing the family name.”

“ But why, with Algernon’s abilities, does he not embark in some professional career?”

“ Like most clever people, the lad never had a grain of common sense. My brother having married so late in life, was superannuated when his boys came to need control; and the younger, a pauper-honourable, has been brought up in the enjoyment of twenty thousand a-year, with as comfortable a prospect of starvation as heart can desire.”

“ He relies perhaps on the brotherly kindness of Lord Medway?”

“ He leans, then, on a reed that will pierce him.—Medway never wasted a thought on the interests of any living creature. He is content to let Algernon live and rule in St. James’s Square, that he may devote his own time to sporting. But Algernon monopolises the noble blood of the family, while Medway takes after his Israelitish ancestors in St. Mary Axe; and he is as capable of turning Algernon’s situation to account, as the brethren of Joseph of selling him to slavery.”

“ Poor Algernon!”

“ Pity him and welcome,—so there be no love in the

case. And having now fairly warned you, it will seriously displease me, child, should I find you encouraging his attentions."

There was no need for alarm. My feelings were just then otherwise occupied. My brother Alfred, the young sailor, had arrived in town, full of life and spirits, and that generous spirit of enterprise, which rendered him from his birth an universal favourite; and though it grieved me to see him devote himself to a profession of perils and privations, I was forced to admit that the boy had chosen wisely, and that the subordination of the navy was alone likely to subdue his wild recklessness.

Nothing could exceed the kindness with which he was welcomed in St. James's Square by his cousin Algernon. But his ship was already under sailing orders; and well do I remember the reprimand I received from Lady Carleton for the tears I shed on the day of his departure for Portsmouth; for, on the following morning, I was to make my first appearance at Court, where red eyes afford no letter of recommendation.

I was to be presented by Lady Harefield; a distant relative of the Rawborne family, and distinguished favourite of the King and Queen. A course of lessons from the celebrated Lepicque, (minueteer to the courts of Versailles, and St. James,) prepared me for the august ceremonial; and, duly attired in presentation-white, and adorned with the Spetchingley pearls, I raised my head with swanlike dignity, prepared to produce a sensation.

But sensations are things of rare occurrence in actual life. Whether singly or in a crowd, people are engrossed by themselves and their belongings, and indifferent to the triumphs of strangers; more particularly at court, where pride and egotism are sharpened by collision. A few of those who happened to stand near me at St. James's thought me perhaps a fine-looking girl, but unformed and awkward; while the rest passed me by with a vacant stare, as part of the furniture of the place. No vanquished Strephon followed me with inquiring eyes to Lady Harefield's carriage; nor did it much disappoint me to learn, the following day, that Boothby, or Hare, or Jekyll, or some other wit, had amused the world of

White's at my expense, by an odious remark about the redundancy of bone in the Leicestershire breed.—No matter what,—the impertinence is not worth repeating.

CHAPTER III.

WE dined the following day in St. James's Square. Lord Rawborne's carriage, which was always sent for us, was followed to the door by the stately equipage of Lady Lavinia Shanstone; and as we watched her ascend the stairs, escorted by her two tall daughters, Clara and Lavinia, my aunt exclaimed in a peevish tone, "This is the first time my sister has found it convenient to dine here this winter.—I lay my life that Medway has arrived."

"Is she so fond, then, of her nephew?"

"So fond, that she wants to make him her son-in-law. Those horrid girls have enormous fortunes; and Lady Lavinia is wild that they should form great matches."

"A saint, yet so ambitious?"

"A saint, because so ambitious. What but the desire of distinction, in Paradise, is the origin of saintship?"

"But fortune will scarcely tempt the rich Lord Medway?"

"Jewish blood!—It would never surprise me to see him marry one of the Shanstones."

My sanctimonious relatives added little to the conviviality of our family party. Lady Lavinia, a woman of narrow understanding, was the widow of a man rewarded by Government with a baronetcy for the same line of conduct in the East, which afterwards brought Warren Hastings into Westminster Hall. Sir Obadiah Shanstone, on his return from Bengal, thought to gloze over, in the eyes of man, the sin of his low extraction, by bribing into wedlock the daughter of an earl; and to gloze over in the eye of Heaven the sin of his Oriental peculations, by trying to make a conventicle of the House of Commons. But Sir Obadiah was gone to his *very* long account;

leaving to Lady Lavinia the disposal of his two tall daughters, and half a million in Sicca rupees. The girls were of an age to be presented in society; but, as prayer-meetings and religious dissipation had not then been introduced into fashionable life, Lady Lavinia was perplexed in what way to reconcile her views for their aggrandisement with the forms of sanctity forced by her marriage on her adoption. Lavinia, the eldest, was a puritan at heart. But I fancied I detected a gleam in the dark eyes of my cousin Clara, indicative of a child of perdition. In their mother's presence, however, both sisters maintained the rigid perpendicularity of the twin towers of Westminster Abbey.

All this was dull enough; and I was mortified by seeing Algernon reduced, for the first time, to the insignificance of a younger brother. Still more, when, in the course of the evening, I discovered the altered state of things established by Lord Medway's arrival. Algernon scrupulously refrained from rendering his father's dotage a spectacle to any but the near relatives of the family; but his brother seemed to keep open house. One after another, half-a-dozen young men, his favourite associates, dropped in;—talking of Newmarket,—White's,—Jockey-club,—Green-room:—not to *us* indeed, but to *him*; and, at length, carrying him off to some of these favoured resorts. Lady Carleton looked indignant; and I expected every moment to hear Lady Lavinia explode. But she turned a deaf ear to the conversation; or rather turned *her* conversation to a deaf ear, by drawing close to the easy chair of the Earl, and directing a monologue to the flannels. It was not her cue to be either shocked or affronted by Lord Medway's proceedings.

At breakfast, next morning, while munching her scanty allotment of dry toast, Lady Carleton expressed her resentment of the unobservant indifference with which Lord Medway had received the presentation of his new cousin.

“His Lordship has my full forgiveness,” said I, calmly.

“The offence, child, was to *me*. Medway should have remembered that you were under *my* protection. But it is easy to trace the source of his contempt. He had

doubtless heard Boothby's *bon-mot* about the Leicestershire breed."

"My cousin Algernon informs me," said I, "that Boothby's wit is regarded at the clubs as obsolete."

"Your cousin Algernon!" interrupted my aunt in a rage: "a pretty authority, truly!"

"You told me the other day, madam, that Mr. Rawborne was a man of wit and fashion about town."

"I might have spared my pains. A girl is always ready to attribute importance to the first silly boy who calls her an angel."

"Had my cousin so wasted his flattery," I rejoined, "he would not have been altogether the first. When Sir Robert Warley proposed for me to my father, I believe he called me an *archangel*."

"Sir Robert Warley, of Speen Park? And your father allowed you to refuse such a match!"

By degrees, the history in all its details was unfolded; and the discovery was advantageous to me. For though it decided Lady Carleton that I was a greater fool than she had supposed me, it also tended to prove that I had attractions which might still verify her projects for my advancement. Even Phillis became more gracious after learning from her lady that a rent-roll of six thousand a-year had been at my disposal.

Her ladyship's animadversions piqued me, however, into bestowing upon Algernon twice as much encouragement as my inclination suggested. Algernon was young, handsome, sprightly, gallant, kind; but his position relatively to myself was such as, with a nature so proud as mine, was decisive against falling in love. I stood towards Lord Rawborne's son in the light of a poor relation. *I*, the daughter of Mordaunt of Spetchingley, accustomed, by the local importance of the name, to fancy myself a great lady; *I*, one of five younger children inheriting my fifth of a settlement of £15,000; *I*, as the inmate on sufferance of a dowager-aunt, was reduced to the degradation of receiving courtesies and obligations at his hands; and to cherish a tender passion for one to whom I had been obliged to say "thank you" for benefits received, was not in my nature.

A day or two after my presentation, Lady Harefield, compassionating perhaps my *fiasco*, offered to chaperon me to one of the weekly balls of the King Street club, better known under the name of the proprietor, Mr. Almack; an ordeal more vital to my fashionable fame, than even the burning ploughshares of St. James's. All eagerness to display my Lepicque-perfected minuet, and a hoop just thirty-three inches in diameter, I prepared my silver brocade, and submitted my side curls to the powder-puff; while Lady Carleton, whose dissipation was confined to drums and card-parties, saw me depart with a smile which the name of Sir Robert Warley had called into her cheeks.

Four o'clock by the chimes of St. James's ere I returned from the ball; and Mrs. Phillis was at the pains of rendering her discontent at sitting up so audible, that I was summoned to the dowager's bed-side for a reprimand.

"What an object the child is!—Scarce a shade of powder left in her hair!"—she ejaculated. "What is the meaning, Miss Mordaunt, of keeping reasonable people out of their beds till this unreasonable hour? Lady Harefield never stays at a ball after two o'clock."

"It was not Lady Harefield, madam, who brought me home. At two o'clock, Lady Harefield was preparing to go away, just as I had engaged myself for a minuet."

"To Mr. Algernon Rawborne, no doubt."

"No, madam;—to the Prince!"

"Prince Stahremberg, pray, or Prince Castelcicala?"

"Neither, madam; the Prince of Wales."

Lady Carleton was now wide awake; and even Mrs. Phillis suspended her grumbling.

"*You* danced with his Royal Highness?"—

"I thought, madam, you would not be displeased at my quitting Lady Harefield's protection to fulfil such an engagement, as the Duchess of Rochester undertook to bring me home."

"The Duchess of Rochester!"—reiterated my aunt, rubbing her eyes, to ascertain whether she were awake.

"I ask your pardon for disturbing your rest," said I, preparing to retire. "We will talk over the ball at breakfast."

“No, my dear child, I insist on hearing all, this very moment. In the first place, how did you like Almack’s?”

“Better than anything I have seen in town.”

“Was my nephew Medway there?”

“He was;—and his brother also.”

“Never mind Algernon—I want to hear about the Duchess.”

“We cannot reach her Grace without Algernon’s assistance. I was moping disconsolately in the tea-room with Lady Harefield, when my cousin approached, in conversation with a lady who had already attracted my attention as the handsomest woman at the ball, whom I heard exclaim in reply to his observations—“My sister Betty’s girl?—A daughter of poor dear Lady Betty Mordaunt’s?”—And, in a moment, my hands were clasped in hers, while the tears started from her eyes.

“I ought to have discovered you at once,” said she, “by your likeness to a sister whom I dearly loved. You are welcome to London; where, by the way, I am just now almost as much a stranger as yourself. What am I to call you?—‘Betty,’ I hope.—The old-fashioned name will remind me of my play-days.”

“I used to be called so.—But I became ‘Lizzy,’ after my mother’s death.”

“Right!” interrupted the Duchess; “too much deference cannot be shown to the memory of a good mother. But, my dear child, I am detaining you from the dance. Have you a partner?”

I was forced to reply by a mortifying negative; and the Duchess issued her commands to Algernon to lead me out.

“Go and do your best,” said she. “I want to ascertain all I have to be proud of in my niece.”

Engrossed by my desire to excel under the Duchess’s scrutiny, I did not raise my eyes towards her during the minuet; and, on returning to her side at the close, was wholly unprepared for the honour of a sudden presentation to the Prince of Wales, with whom she was in conversation.

“Then I lay my life you were as awkward as a milk-maid!” cried Lady Carleton.

"I think not, or his Royal Highness would scarcely have condescended to ask my hand for the following minuet."

"And after the minuet?"

"After the minuet, a miracle!—My cousin Medway found me grown worthy of becoming his partner; an honour for which I thought it my duty to acknowledge my obligation to the Duchess."

"Vastly bad taste, child, for one of your years to indulge in the flippancy of a joke with a person—"

"Do not say of *hers*, if you hope for pardon, my dear aunt," interrupted I. "Besides, her Grace appears as light-hearted as myself. I never saw so lively a person."

"The liveliness of a fine set of teeth. Smiles become her."

"In *her*, everything seems becoming. She embraced me at parting, and expressed a hope (as I must be so great an incumbrance to yourself) to have me a great deal with her during my stay in town."

"Well, well,—enough of her Grace's plans and perfections for to-night," said Lady Carleton, affecting a yawn. "Homely people, who not dance with Royal Highnesses, are not so fond of having their night's rest disturbed."

I was forced to retire; but not to sleep. If the nights preceding my removal from Spetchingley to London had been unquiet, what were the visions of glory which now crowded on my aching sight! Hitherto, my sojourn in the great Babylon had been a matter of disappointment. Lady Carleton's modes of life were wearisome; her society was composed of people, like herself, inclining to threescore; old bachelors and old maids,—widows and widowers,—the ragged selvage of the aristocracy. To enable me to taste even sparingly of the pleasures of society, she was often forced to apply to chaperons who thought her troublesome; and I, so long accustomed to courtesy as the daughter of the Mordaunts of Spetchingley, found myself rejected by many, and importunate to all.

But now, this was to be reformed. The affectionate notice of the Duchess of Rochester would assign me in society a place more consonant with my pretensions. Henceforward, London was to assume a new aspect.

CHAPTER IV.

HAVING entered thus minutely into my family affairs, it is time my recollections should include that more extensive framework of society which surrounded the trivial group I have been describing. Yet though London was then comparatively circumscribed, and the outworks of the great world were more strongly set up than now against the encroachment of aspiring opulence, society was less easy to collect into a focus. There existed, as in Paris, distinct societies of the court and the town ; and Windsor Castle ate its roast mutton, while Carlton House devilled its kidneys. Religion and politics, if less potential, were more polemic. People did not slide from a house where High church implied salvation, to one where Low church was all in all ; or glide from an assembly given by a Whig premier, to a ball overruled by the blessed hierarchy of the Tories. There were as many divisions and subdivisions in society as there are canals in the city of Ghent ; where a thousand bridges are indispensable to enable neighbour A. to live on neighbourly terms with neighbour B.

Under such disadvantages, a sketch of social life must be less accurate than at the present time, when all is imitation,—echo,—tautology ;—when “half the platform just reflects the other,” and the aristocracy of rank stands aloft on its pedestal, in order that its illegitimate brother, the aristocracy of wealth, may prove affinity by aping every grimace and exaggerating every gesture.

Nevertheless, some generalities existed that served to impress the epoch on my memory. Much as has been said of the demoralisation of the higher classes during the decrepitude of George IV., the demoralisation prevalent during his youth was far more remarkable. Paris, like a repentant Magdalen, affected just then, on the death of a vicious, and the accession of a virtuous sovereign, the most prudish propriety ; and, as Horace Walpole used to

say of France and England, that “like the sea and land, *one* could not gain without the other being a loser,” the vices put out of countenance by Louis XVI., took refuge under the protection of the Prince of Wales. Madame du Barri retreated into the obscurity of her pavilion at Luciennes; but the chariot of a Perdita drove triumphantly through the parish of St. James.

From the days of Alcibiades, however, to those of Brummel, fine gentlemen have existed, like excrescences on the oak, the disease and not the product of the age. It is rather from the women, the matrons of the times, I would draw deductions of its morality; and I own that, in defiance of the example of a most domestic court, the noble ladies my contemporaries would have little to learn from the levities of their grand-daughters.

Though less graced with superficial accomplishments than the damsels of to-day, our reasoning faculties were at that time better cultivated. We performed no miraculous concertos, competed for no prizes at the Society of Arts; but we were the chosen associates of a Johnson, a Cowper, a Burke. We listened more,—we chattered less. But this intellectual cultivation added only a new page to the annals of gallantry. It was only the conversion of Laïs into Aspasia. From Mrs. Robinson to my lovely relative, the danger was but magnified through the atmosphere of refinement surrounding the meretricious charms of the goddess of voluptuousness.

In its highest circle, London already emulated the witty profligacy of Paris under the sceptre of Louis XV., and the influence of a Boufflers and a Du Deffand. Of these, more than enough has been consigned to us in the memoirs of their day. But, saving in the archives of Doctors’ Commons, nothing remains to perpetuate the peccadilloes of our grandmothers; for the Prudery of England, like that of the Spartan virgins, heeds not that her zone should be unbound, so it be done in darkness and silence.

Septuagenarian as I am, however, I lift up my voice to attest that the last age was a sinner in its generation; and unmisled by maternal blindness or bitterness, have no hesitation in tracing the effeminacy and fatuity of

certain lords of the creation and the realm, of the present day, to the bad habits of their progenitresses. When I arrived in London, its ways were “pleasant but wrong.” It was something, at least, that they *were* “pleasant;” for I have since found them not only “wrong,” but mighty disagreeable.

The morning after my unexpected introduction to my Duchess aunt, I entered Lady Carleton’s breakfast-room prepared for a storm; for on the stairs I had encountered Mistress Phillis, wearing her most smiling countenance, as was invariably the case when she had been stirring up the wrath of her lady.

“Almost noon!” she exclaimed, looking at her huge enamelled Tompion, as I made my appearance. “You have been dreaming, I presume, of crowns and coronets.”

“I am now fully awake to the attractions of tea and toast,” I replied, taking my accustomed place, and trying to look unconscious of her ill-humour.

“I have been reflecting, Miss Mordaunt, on our conversation of last night,” said my aunt, coming at once to the point, as she dashed, rather than dropped, the sugar into my cup; “and as an inexperienced young woman, I feel it my duty to decline giving you up to the care of the Duchess of Rochester, without previously warning your father.”

“This is the first I have heard of such a scheme, madam,” I replied. “My aunt expressed herself anxious to conduce to the amusement of my season in town. Not a word was said of taking me under her protection; and even had there been a thousand, you cannot suppose me so ungrateful as already to forget your promptitude in affording me a home, when my father’s roof became distasteful.”

“Well, well!” said the Viscountess, somewhat mollified. “I am glad to find, child, that you see things in a proper light.”

“I certainly, however, conceived, from the manner in which I have heard your Ladyship, and still more frequently Mrs. Phillis, enlarge on the trouble and expense occasioned by my residence here, that you would not be sorry to be relieved from my presence.”

“Certainly not,” answered Lady C——, “had I anything at heart but your permanent advantage. But the roof of the Duchess of Rochester is not one under which a girl,—a mere child,—can with impunity become an inmate. Rochester House is the head-quarters of the witty and wicked of the metropolis. Her Grace is the high priestess of the *beaux esprits* of the day. Strange as it may seem, I have one sister a disciple of Whitfield, and another of Voltaire;—two silly women, neither better nor worse, though more self-sufficient, than the rest of their sex.”

“The Duchess,” said I, more timidly, “talked of visiting you this morning. She has been but three days arrived from Paris—”

“Bringing with her an importation of fashions and follies, enough to poison the morals of the parish!—Did she say what would be worn in the way of hoods this spring?”

“She did not attempt to poison *me*. Though beautifully dressed, she seemed perfectly indifferent on such subjects.”

At that moment, the Rochester *vis-a-vis*, with its liveries of blue and silver, stopped at the door; and, preceded by a potent odour of *Marechale*, and two yelping, silken-haired lap-dogs, the lady we were so freely discussing glided into the room.

“I have not a moment to stay. I am in the most miserable hurry.—How do, Lady Carleton? You are looking a world of wonders younger and better than when I left England. I am come to borrow this child of you. You must lend her to me for Moses in the Bulrushes.”

I was all astonishment; Lady Carleton equally bewildered.

“Your Grace is, of course, welcome to Miss Mordaunt’s society,” said she, stiffly. “The purport of your request, I suppose, I live too much out of the world to understand.”

“I thought all London had heard of Sherwin’s Moses?” said the Duchess.

“Neither of Sherwin nor his Moses. But no matter. A Moses, patronised by the Duchess of Rochester, is,

doubtless, the fashion. Go, child; put on your hat and cloak to accompany your aunt."

"Her aunt—oh, horror of horrors!—Go, little girl—make haste; and show too much tact to insult me with such a title."

I hastened to obey; and, on my return, found that the sisterly regard of the two ladies was scarcely sufficient to restrain them within terms of courtesy.

"I wish you joy," cried the Duchess, as we entered her carriage, and drove off at a tremendous pace. "I was happy to perceive in you, at first sight, my dear, a claim to the clear complexion and lofty carriage of the Raw-bornes. On a second interview, I find you rise superior to their virtues, since you can put up with that tiresome old woman, which I positively can *not*."

"Lady Carleton took compassion upon me, under the disagreeable circumstances of my father's second marriage."

"Don't make me detest her more," interrupted the Duchess, "by taking up her defence. You will put me out of humour, which will put me out of countenance, which will bring me to shame where I have promised myself to be brought to honour. In a moment, we shall be at Sherwin's;—Sherwin lodges in St. James's Street. There!—Look at the carriages waiting at his door.—I knew I should be late!"—

I now recollect having heard this artist named by the friends of Lord Medway, when relating the gossip of the town in St. James's Square, as young and self-educated, sinking, or rather rising, under the weight of aristocratic patronage. Three duchesses were in constant attendance on his easel! The elegance of his costume and style of life spoke of the patron rather than the patronised; and, while the painter busied himself in transmitting to posterity the smiles of the charmers around him, the charmers around him busied themselves in lavishing upon their immortaliser the brightest of their smiles.

The picture alluded to by the Duchess of Rochester, "The Finding of Moses," occupied just then the exclusive attention of Sherwin. An infant Hercules had dropped from the skies, or the Foundling Hospital, to form the model for the babe; and the Princess Royal was to stand

for the Egyptian princess, surrounded by all that was fairest of the aristocracy as her attendant maidens. In this attractive group, the Duchess of Rochester had been solicited to take a place; and it did not surprise me, when we hurried into Sherwin's painting-room where the sitting was already begun, and the Duchesses of Devonshire and Rutland established in their parts, to observe the vexation produced in more than one beauteous countenance, by the arrival of her Grace.

"I am too late—you are admirably grouped—I shall interrupt you!" said the Duchess, affecting to retreat. But the artist, remembering the instructions he had received from his royal patron, insisted on detaining her: "a new maid of honour could easily be added to the household of Pharaoh's daughter." Just, however, as the Duchess was fixed in her post of honour, it seemed to occur to Mr. Sherwin that two were more easily introduced than one; and, addressing himself to my aunt, he observed, pointing to myself, that "if that young lady would condescend to favour him, the adjustment of the group would be more perfect."

I was of course well pleased to attach myself to a company so distinguished. That day was devoted to the composition of the group. And what a fund of amusement for any rational being, to have entered the room where stood, in hoops, and powdered *têtes* or *poufs*, a dozen of the finest ladies in the land, hating each other with indescribable hatred, but looking delightfully with all their might, for the benefit of the maccaroni-artist, arrayed, as was the fashion of the day, in a scarlet coat, with nankeen shorts, and top boots!—Such were the preparatory steps for "The Finding of Moses in the Bulrushes."

"All this has been very tiresome," said the Duchess, when we regained the carriage; "and if I am to read my face reflected in your own, we neither of us look the better for our attempts at beauty. We have sadly lost our time, too; for we must hasten home to dine, or the Duke will be late at the House, and you and I at the Pantheon."

"I fear I must beg you to take me to Jermyn Street. Not having apprised Lady Carleton——"

"Apprised?—Of what?—My sister knows you are under my domination. But if you are afraid of being scolded black and blue, let us stop the carriage in Jermyn Street. 'John—my compliments to Lady Carleton, and Miss Mordaunt dines with me to-day.—I will send her home at night.'"

I liked this peremptory mode of settling matters, as it happened to settle them in the way that suited me. "You need not ask for a change of dress," added the Duchess; "I dare say you have nothing belonging to you that is not horrible; and, as we are of a size, some of my Paris finery will do better."

The distance seemed considerable between Jermyn Street and Rochester House. I was not aware that the ancient mansion of the De Veres stood in so remote a quarter as the neighbourhood of Montague House, now known as the British Museum; having been built "in the fieldes neare Pancrace," when not a mansion intervened between its spacious court and the Hampstead hills.

"I am trying to persuade the Duke," said she, "to exchange this antediluvian mansion for one in Spring Gardens, adjoining the Mall. We have here a vast garden, worth its weight—not in gold—but brick-earth,—which would create half a parish on the spot. At present, we have scarcely subsided into our new dignities and possessions; but John, who is fond of Brookes's and Carlton House, as I of Almack's and the Opera, finds himself sadly isolated here; so that I have hope of success."

This was the first time I had heard mention of "John." From the recency of his father's death, and his accession to the title, I vaguely concluded him to be a young man; and was greatly surprised, on my presentation to the Duke of Rochester, to find him at least twenty years older than his wife,—a man of grave and imposing presence.

"Have we any one to dinner?" inquired his Grace, when we re-entered the drawing-room, attired with the last finish of Parisian elegance.

"No one. I expect the boys in the evening, to escort us to the Pantheon."

I was puzzled. Could the Duchess, young as she

looked, have sons old enough to accompany us to a place of public resort?—I took an early opportunity of solving my doubts.

“The boys, my *sons*?”—said she, laughing heartily. “My dear child! Where is your Debrett? Before I was your age, I could have dated every member of the house of Rawborne to a year and a day, or rather to a day and a year. Begin, I beseech, your studies to-morrow, and you will find *me* Debretted at nine and twenty. Alas! that I should have to plead guilty to my thirtieth year!”

There certainly was no personal indication of the necessity. The Duchess might have subtracted half a dozen years, and none but a rival beauty have gainsayed her. These “boys” of hers must be of tender years;—and I now ventured to inquire their age.

“Still harping on my sons?—No! my dear Miss Mordaunt,” said she, evidently in a tone of vexation, “I am not so fortunate as to be the mother of a son. I have daughters, (more almost than I care to acknowledge,) very much at your service, whenever you feel inclined to drive down to a rambling, old-fashioned villa of ours at Chelsea; where the five Lady De Veres, and five acres of flower-beds, are growing and blowing.”

“You do not have them with you, then, in London?”

“I did not have them with me even at Paris. Children, like trees, do not bear transplanting till a certain age: every removal disturbs their health and education. My girls are destined to Beaufort Lodge for the next five years, when Lady Helena will be old enough to be presented, and her mother old enough to be a grandmother.”

“Your Grace will perhaps take me, some day, to visit my little cousins?”

“Some day, when my Grace is in the mood maternal. I do not often go to Chelsea. My arrival throws governesses, nurses, and children into confusion.”

All this displeased me. I began to feel the truth of the Duchess’s tribute to the memory of my mother,—“We Rawbornes are a heartless set,—Betty was the best of us!”—For without regard to the discomfiture of lessons or governess, I cannot remember the day of my early life, when less than a third of the twenty-four

hours was spent in the presence of my mother. Lady Betty Mordaunt would not have allowed a girl of us to sleep from under her roof, to have endowed us with the learning of Anne Dacier, or Lady Jane Grey.

The Duchess noticed my reverie. “At the risk of repeating myself,—still harping on my sons!” she exclaimed. “Know then that ‘the boys’ are my nephews,—Medway and Algernon; who, for ten years of their life and mine, were as sons or brothers to me. Lord Rawborne (as with all your family ignorance you may happen to know) was the best-natured and poorest of peers, when, on his accession to his title, he sold his good-nature and poverty to a Jessica, richer than all her tribe; and found worthy use for his new fortunes by taking under his roof the two orphan girls with which his father’s second marriage had burthened the family. I and my sister Louisa (now wife to the Dean of Ripon) resided with him in St. James’s Square from eight years old till eighteen; and, after the early death of their mother, those boys became our own. Louisa doats on Medway, I on Algernon; but in truth I love them both, and would fain repay them in affection the debt of kindness I owe their father. Lord Rawborne is morally dead, and unconscious of my good-will. The boys are bright and flourishing.”

While she ran on in this way, the Duke ate his dinner in silence. But it was plain he liked to hear, and even see her talk. Strong affection and strong admiration were mingled in his looks. He was an indolent man. His enjoyments were all passive; and his wife supplied energy and vivacity for both.

But for her gaiety, Rochester House would have been as solemn as Westminster Abbey. The apartments were grand and lofty, with painted ceilings, carved wainscots, or hangings of gilt leather. Stately historical portraits adorned the walls. A crowd of servants waited in stately liveries. All remained as in the time of the late duke,—a formal courtier of Frederick Prince of Wales.

While we were taking coffee, “the boys” made their appearance; singly, and with a mutual salutation of “How are you, Medway?”—“Algernon, how are you?”—that

said little in favour of their brotherly intercourse. Soon afterwards, and just as the Duke of Rochester's carriage had been announced, the doors were thrown open more formally than for the nephews of her Grace, and under the name of "Mr. De Vere Fitzirnham," a tall handsome young man was ushered into the room. The Duchess and my cousins looked surprised at the visit. But the enigma was solved by the Duke of Rochester leading the stranger to his wife, and presenting him as "the son of my late friend, Mr. Fitzirnham, whose acquaintance I made yesterday at dinner at Jack Townshend's.—The last time we met," added the Duke, pointedly, "was at his father's place in Kent; when my knee was the privileged post of my little godson."

"You have, I trust, engaged Mr. Fitzirnham to join our party to the Pantheon, to-night?" said the Duchess, with one of her most ingratiating smiles, addressing the new comer, rather than the Duke.

"His Grace was too considerate, madam, to throw such a temptation in my way," replied he, with an air of ceremony. "I am here for the graver purpose of accompanying him to the House. This is the night of the India Bill."

"And I must already hasten you away," added the Duke, looking at his watch; on which, they took leave and departed.

"A fine young man," said the Duchess, as the door closed after the Duke and his *protégé*.

"Prodigiously fine, though not in point of ruffles," said Lord Medway, with a sneer.

"I have often met Fitzirnham at Brookes's and Becket's," observed my cousin Algernon. "He seems popular. Erskine or Finch told me he was looking for political preferment, and was considered a rising young man."

"He belongs, then, to Brookes's?"—inquired Lord Medway, in an altered tone.

"He belongs to everything;—a nephew, you know, of the late Lord Halifax."

A kinsmanship which seemed to establish the stranger, at once, in the good opinion of my elder cousin.

CHAPTER V.

ON this, and many following occasions, Lady Carleton was circumstantial in her inquiries as to all I had heard, seen, or imagined at Rochester House. Little, however, as I knew of the world, I felt it necessary to guard my replies. I had "passed a pleasant day, concluding with a party to the Pantheon; where we were escorted by my two cousins, and joined by a Lord and Lady Pembury, and Sir Claude Lovell. Mr. Fitzirnham," I added, "preferred attending a debate in the House of Lords."

"*What Mr. Fitzirnham?*"

"A godson of the Duke, and son to one of his early friends."

"Aha!" cried Lady Carleton, with a significant smile; "I always guessed as much!—She was an exquisitely beautiful woman."

I was too discreet to inquire the meaning of these allusions; particularly as she spoke of the Duchess in terms equally mysterious; and in course of time, as her Grace's kindness towards me increased, Lady Carleton's vindictive feelings became more and more apparent. Whenever my duchess-aunt arranged some party to Ranelagh, or the theatre, in which she wished me to be included, my dowager-aunt was sure to project some abominable tredrille, or tea-drinking, at home; and, to prevent my accompanying the Duchess one night to Almack's, she tied up her head, on pretext of a toothache, and compelled me to pass the evening in soothing it with the polite literature of the "Town and Country Magazine," and the gentle Elegies of Mr. Pratt. Even the sittings at Sherwin's soon failed as a pretext for enjoying the society of the Duchess of Rochester. Long before little Moses could be surrounded by his nymphs and bulrushes, the Duchess of Rutland being compelled to quit her post for that of the Viceroyalty of Ireland, the picture was at a stand-still.

Meantime, the letters I received from Spetchingley were far from satisfactory. I found from Jane and Helen, who were permitted to correspond with me unrestricted, that they experienced all possible kindness and consideration from my step-mother; but that everything had grown duller since my departure; that several of the old servants had been dismissed, and very little company visited at the house. The latter circumstance was easily accounted for, by the dissatisfaction of the neighbouring families at the successor chosen by Mr. Mordaunt to the loved and venerated Lady Betty. But Jane imparted particulars calculated to excite my uneasiness. My father, she said, was miserably out of spirits, and would pass hours and hours without speaking; especially while his cousin Dick was away a week in town for the arrangement of family business.

Dick Mordaunt in town?—I should have as soon expected to hear of Stonehenge finding its way to Hyde Park!—And for the arrangement of family business,—when my father might just as well have relied upon the intervention of his shooting pony. I forgave the creature for having passed me over with such disregard, as not even to leave his name in Jermyn Street. But what *could* be the business which demanded his migration from Leicestershire, and reduced my jovial father to meditation? Careful not to excite the curiosity of my aunt, I addressed my inquiries on the subject to my eldest brother, the confidant of all my dilemmas.

“That there *is* a mystery, I readily believe,” was Henry’s reply. “But my father has always shown reluctance in adverting to his affairs in my presence. Unless actuated by the jealousy of his successor common to sovereigns and squires, I cannot conceive why he should withhold his confidence from a son who loves and respects him, to lavish it on a kinsman who, to do him justice, has scarcely wit enough for an earth-stopper. An observation that escaped my father in the altercation between us on occasion of his second marriage, first led me to suspect that his affairs were embarrassed. He spoke of the want of housewifery of ladies of quality, as gradually

leading a respectable country family to ruin, in a tone of conscious bitterness, which I feared must bear reference to his own. Let not, however, my dear Lizzy concern herself too much on mere surmise. We know the style of living at Spetchingley. The house is maintained on its own resources, and neither parents nor children indulge in blameable excess. Embarrassments, even if they exist, must be of a comparatively unimportant nature ; and, unless aggravated by the blunder-headedness of Dick Mordaunt, will scarcely bring the family estates to the hammer.

“ My brother Alfred has been provided for by Lord Rawborne. Miss Mordaunt, of whose conquests wonders are related at Oxford, is expected to make a brilliant match ; and she is hereby requested to look out without delay for an heiress, (not, however, after the Rawborne fashion, at the synagogue,) for her affectionate brother,

“ H. M.”

This letter served to rally my spirits. I began to hope that my father’s melancholy might proceed from the absence of his favourite “ Lizzy ;” and that Dick Mordaunt’s expedition to London was an act of pure vagabondage. Perhaps he wanted to spy into the nakedness of the land, and ascertain into how moderate a compass of brick and mortar his proud cousin had been compelled to compress her pretensions.

From such surmises, it was agreeable to be summoned by the playful peremptoriness of the Duchess.

“ I am under orders from my Duke and master to proceed this moment to Chelsea,” said she, one morning, snatching the fourth volume of “ Sydney Biddulph ” from my hand, and causing Lady Carleton to drop her quilting, with surprise. “ Bear me company, my dear Liz, and to reward you, we will finish to-night at Ranelagh. You must not refuse me, sister,” she continued, addressing Lady Carleton, “ for I have pledged myself for Miss Mordaunt’s presence to one whom it is little less than high-treason to disappoint.”

“ I do not see how such a person can with propriety interest himself in Miss Mordaunt’s comings and goings ;”

said Lady Carleton, provoked to find her authority thus tacitly dispensed with. “But as your Grace and the young lady settle these things with so much ease between you,—I—”

“What a handsome quilt that will be, when finished!” cried the Duchess, affecting to pick it up without giving ear to the remonstrances of the Viscountess. “I saw just such a one, at Paris, at Madame de Mirepoix’s; who declared it was worked for her when ambassadress in England, by the beautiful Lady Coventry,—Maria, you know,—the woman who died of white lead.”

By aid of her *sang froid*, she always managed to defeat the manœuvres of Lady Carleton.

“What a happy woman should I be,” she observed, when, after a pleasant drive along the King’s Road, we reached a pair of huge, old-fashioned iron gates, opening into a gloomy avenue of sycamores, “were I, like our venerable cousin of Portland, smitten with the love of antiquity!—All the earthly possessions of the De Veres are encrusted with the mildew of age. The three last Dukes of Rochester lived to be doting; so that their successors did not inherit till they were too old to improve,—I mean, to become improvers. You have already seen Rochester House. Lift up your eyes, my dear, and admire Beaufort Lodge,—once the residence of Sir Thomas More, and now the *maison de santé* of the Très-nobles Demoiselles De Vere, whom you see crowded yonder under the old portal to receive us.”

I lifted up my eyes to admire—not Beaufort Lodge and its antiquities, but the youthful beauty of my little cousins.—What a group!—What a study for Sherwin!—Yet their mother patted each upon the head with scarcely more emotion than I had seen her bestow with the same caress on Silverfleece, her lap-dog! While Lady Isabella and Lady Helena, the two elder girls, strove to attract her attention by every little art in their power, the Duchess kept pointing out to me the painted windows and quaint carvings of the curious old mansion.

A venerable family nurse, who, leaning on her stick, waited the arrival of the Duchess in the great gallery, now converted into a school-room, seemed, by the reserved

solemnity of her deportment, to resent this coolness on the part of the mother of her nurslings ; while the French and German governesses pressed forward to gabble their compliments to her Grace, evidently with a view of eliciting some in return.

But they were disappointed.

“ Don’t you find these creatures shockingly awkward ? ” said my aunt, addressing me. “ Helena, stand forward—Lady Isabella, pray do not let your arms hang as if they were broken. ’Tis really strange. They have had Lepicque all winter, and are more uncouth than when I left England.”

“ What can be expected at so early an age ? ”

“ Everything ! —

Just as the twig is bent, the tree’s inclined ;

and if Miss Holdfast, Mademoiselle Clairval, and Madame von Klattowski, cannot drill them into a better deportment, I must send them to Paris, and settle them at Panthémont. I saw a little girl of Madame de Lauzun’s, not so old as Isabella, perform the minuet and gavotte, one night at Trianon, in a style that Vestris himself admitted to be inimitable.”

She started ; for at that moment, she perceived that, while uttering all this heartless nonsense, the Duke of Rochester had entered the room. It was delightful to see the little creatures, who were hanging their heads behind the Duchess’s chair, brighten up on their father’s approach. As he sat down, with hands extended towards them, all five were instantly clustered round his knees. From Lady Helena it was, “ Dearest papa, I have finished the landscape I promised you ; ”—from Lady Isabella, “ I am embroidering you a waistcoat, papa, for the birthday.” A third claimed the fine gold watch he had promised to bring her from Paris ; the two youngest little creatures could exact or bestow nothing but kisses on their favourite—their friend—their father !

In return for these endearments, the Duke brought forward a case containing for each some little token of remembrance,—a ring, a locket, an étui ; of no great value, but calculated to procure childish delight to a child.

“ You put me to the blush,” observed the Duchess, *literally* blushing with mortification. “ I suppose the strictness of my education blinded me to the necessity of initiating children into the pomps and vanities of life. But I will shortly, young ladies, amend my neglect, and we shall see whether Mrs. Chenevix can supply us with baubles to rival those of the Petit Dunquerque.”

The Duke of Rochester was a person to whom the world in general scarcely rendered justice. Society is an arbitrary tribunal. It chooses the wife of its popular poet to be a woman of genius; the wife of its favourite statesman to be an Agrippina. It seemed of opinion that the husband of its lovely Duchess ought to be an Adonis; and the Duke, though a distinguished-looking man, was neither young nor handsome. His hair, a sable silvered, grew every day whiter; his countenance, naturally grave, every day more serious. His broad commanding forehead, his reflective eye, the firm, though benignant expression of his countenance, would have attracted, if limned by Vandyke or Sir Joshua, the idlest lounger through a picture gallery to inquire the name of the original; certain of hearing in reply the announcement of some great legislator, some benefactor of his country.

But such a face was misplaced at Ranelagh, and voted, in the gay *salons* of the Mirepoixes and Boufflers, *ennuyeux comme la pluie*. It became the fashion to say that Lady John De Vere was ill-matched; that she had an old and disagreeable husband; though London and Paris united could not have produced his equal.

CHAPTER VI.

As we were returning from our visit to the little girls, whose adieus were damped by the supercilious tone assumed towards them by their mother, some anxiety expressed by the Duchess respecting the completion of a new hat, induced me to allude to our projected party to Ranelagh, as if it included the Prince of Wales.

“ You have not yet got rid of your Philly Nettletop naïveté,” she replied, laughing outright. “ A less practised eye than yours might have seen that the Prince’s name was thrown into the scale to decide poor old Carleton in our favour. He *may* be there; and *if* there, (or bright eyes go for nothing,) will certainly join our party. But the illustrious personage to whom I alluded was no other than Lord Pembury; to whom I promised, in presence of his wife, that Miss Mordaunt should bear me company to-night, because the said wife is too jealous to let him join me with the possible prospect of a *tête-à-tête*. How I *do* hate a jealous wife!—If the next philanthropic Captain Coram who wants to found an hospital would but relieve us from such semi-lunatics, what a benefit to society! I own I cannot understand the malady. All Ranelagh might flirt with my duke, and I should care no more than if he were dozing away his evening in the House of Lords.”

Needless to remind her how far this admission went to prove her want of attachment towards her husband.

“ And of all women to indulge in jealousy, Lady Pembury!” she exclaimed. “ A woman who cares for nothing in this world of vanity and cards but the four knaves! Had she taken it into her head to pull caps with me for Pam, I could have forgiven her; for last year, at Bath, I won three hundred guineas of her, at old Lady Montagu’s *loo* parties.—But Lord Pembury,—for whom she entertains no higher value than *I* for the effigy of General Monk in Westminster Abbey!—It is too absurd.”

“ Lady Pembury strikes me as a beautiful woman,” said I.

“ Beautiful, for those who prefer colour to form. She has a charming pink and white complexion, eyes like the Midsummer sky, and the old eternal story of coral lips and teeth of pearl. But one may buy just such waxen beauty in a toy shop. No expression,—no character,—no play of feature;—the monotonous innocence of a flock of sheep concentrated in a single face!—How dares so inanimate a creature expect to preserve the affections of a man of taste and talent!”

“Certainly not by losing his money at *loo*,” said I, laughing.

“Pembury would forget her existence,” replied the Duchess, inadvertently, “unless she occasionally favoured him with reminders, in the form of cheques upon his banker.”

“I no longer wonder that Lady Pembury is jealous,” said I, as we turned from Oxford Road into the newly-paved streets leading towards the *rus in urbe* of the house of De Vere.

“In my opinion,” retorted the Duchess, “husbands and wives should have attractions and merits to produce, as title-deeds to their property, in addition to the special license by which they were originally transferred.”

“A Parisian, rather than an English sentiment!” said I, adventurously. “Had it been uttered within hearing of my homely home, I should have expected to see the trees of the old avenue of Spetchingley start from their places.”

“Less would probably suffice to unroot them,” replied the Duchess, looking at her watch. “In England, the country gives the law to the town; while in France, the town keeps down the country. Paris has its factories for the improvement of ideas for the good of the kingdom, as well as for the improvement of calicoes or crockeryware; *et bon train, en avant le siècle!* Whereas *our* country gentlemen impose upon London their quizzical families and quizzical notions, while they vote with Government, and see the lions. But here we are again at Rochester House. I would as soon live in the great pyramid, *tête-à-tête* with the mummy of Cheops!”

Already, I had learned to turn a deaf ear to half the flighty ramblings of the Duchess. My cousin Algernon assured me she seldom knew half she said, or meant the other half.

“In London,” said he, “the Duchess is a mere prating mask, who gabbles on to prevent her real character from being discovered. Get her at anchor, at Vere Court, in the quiet country, and, instead of the Thames so foul and turbid at Blackfriars Bridge, you will find the glassy Isis, pure and wholesome, gliding through the green meadows.”

The simile was graceful—I hoped to find it accurate.

Our party that night at Ranelagh was composed of a sufficient number of Sherwin's beauties and White's fine gentlemen, to excite considerable attention. Wherever we turned, our steps were followed. The music we thought worth listening to was vehemently applauded; and when we sat down to supper, that gaping monster, the public, came to note how we swallowed our minced chicken and champagne. We had, however, no Prince of Wales. Other orgies were perhaps more attractive; and, as to Lady Pembury and her jealousies, she seemed to take as little note of the proceedings of the Duchess as of mine.

She was escorted throughout the evening by Mr. Fitzirnham, whom I had now heard proclaimed, by twenty different voices, the most agreeable man about town.

"I can't make out that Fitzirnham, whom Algernon calls good company," observed Lord Medway, who was appointed my cavalier. "The fellow seems to have dropped from the clouds among us; and, like other things that drop from the clouds, what passes to-day for a thunderbolt, may prove to-morrow a piece of base metal."

"Mr. Fitzirnham may, in one respect, have fallen from the clouds," said I. "Lady Duncannon pronounces him to be as handsome as an angel."

"Humph! he has a *faux air* of the Duke of Rochester—a sort of pinchbeck look of fashion. I fancy, however, your angel is rather a man of letters, than a man of quality. He sets up as heir presumptive or presumptuous to George Selwyn, who is superannuated. They repeat this man's *bon-mots* at White's; Mrs. Vesey swears by his wit—"

"And Lady Pembury smiles by it, which is better. A very pretty woman, Lady Pembury!"

"I prefer many a plain one. Lady Pembury blazes in eternal sunshine, with a set smile of beatitude and beauty, ineffably self-contented. One sees that she has been a star at Bath, at Spa, in Paris, in London."

"Indeed I see nothing in her but a beautiful woman."

"While she—or I am mistaken—sees in *you* that hateful thing, a rival! By the way, do we meet to-morrow night at the dinner at Rochester House?"

“I have no invitation.”

“And will probably receive none. The Duchess could not *invite* you without Lady Carleton; and in a family so numerous as ours, to begin inviting one’s relations is a rash measure.”

Glibly as he settled the question, it was no easy matter to tranquillise the ire of the Viscountess when, on the following morning, the gossip of the St. James’s Chronicle announced the Assembly at Rochester House.

“It is not,” she exclaimed, “that I have the slightest wish to be mixed up with the set of profligates whom the Duchess is pleased to assemble around her. But it has a singular appearance to the public, for her own family to be excluded from her mob. All London will be in arms.”

“All London is otherwise employed,” I ventured to observe. “The Clubs are busy discussing the expected visit of the Duc de Chartres; and the fine ladies the dismissal of Perdita, upon whose chariot the basket of white roses, simulating a countess’s coronet, had so excited their indignation. They have no leisure to notice our disappointment.”

“I tell you it is *no* disappointment!” said Lady Carleton, in a higher key. “My sole reason for vexation at the Duchess’s neglect is, that, involved as she is in scandalous imputations—”

She paused. The loudness of her tone had prevented her hearing the announcement of a visitor; and the Duke of Rochester, with a card in his hand, already stood bowing at the door.

“I have to apologise for my intrusion,” said he, struck by our air of confusion. “Let my anxiety to be the bearer of a note from the Duchess plead my excuse.” The card which he placed in the hands of the Viscountess, enabled me to admire the matchless skill of her Grace in the lying logic of apology. “She trusted,” she said, “that an invitation to a crowded assembly at Rochester House was needless to any member of the Rawborne family; but, lest the well-known politeness of Lady Carleton should prove punctilious, she had requested the Duke to be her representative in expressing, etc. etc.”

I expected to see Lady Carleton return a dignified refusal to this tardy civility. But the invitation was so graciously accepted, that, after the departure of the Duke, I could not help testifying my surprise.

“I had a strong motive for wishing to be at the party,” replied Lady C——. “The Prince, who of course will be there, is going to give a gala at Carlton House, after the political dinner of the gentlemen of St. Albans Committee; and, perhaps, on meeting us at my sister’s, he may consider us worth inviting.”

“But you have so long retired from the world, and avoid so scrupulously all public places!”

“I do not, like my sister Rochester and her clique, make my face a sign-post for Weltje’s, the Pantheon, Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and other notorious resorts. But this ball at Carlton House may be considered the opening of a new era. It is worth walking from York to London, to see the Prince put on his hat in a minuet. Lepicque declares there never was anything like him;—George Selwyn declares there never was anything like him;—Charles Fox declares there never was anything like him——”

“And Mrs. Robinson—and Mrs. Crouch——”

“I request, Miss Mordaunt, that you will refrain from naming such persons in my presence.”

“His Royal Highness, then, shall be all perfection, dear aunt; and let us humbly hope he will vouchsafe us an invitation to his ball. But, I warn you, that the Duchess of Devonshire, with Lady Duncannon and Lady Melbourne, have made out the list; and our claim of kin to the Duchess of Rochester argues ill in our favour.”

“I have a vast mind to drop my sister’s interest altogether,” said Lady C——, musingly, “and see what I can do through Devonshire House. Lord Carleton was one of the many friends of Mr. Hare; (Selwyn’s ‘Hare with many friends,’ you know.) Supposing I tack about, and try *his* interest?”

“But you forgot that you have pledged yourself to the Rochesters.”

“True, true.—And when the ball at Carlton House is over and forgotten, we shall see at Rochester House this Duc de Chartres, of whom all the world is talking. At

Paris, last winter, my sister was the only Englishwoman who succeeded equally well with the Court and the Orleans party; playing alternately soubrettes in the theatricals at Trianon, and duets with Madame de Genlis. My nephew would add, ‘and pharoah with the Duchesse de Grammont, and the deuce with her reputation!’”

That night, the Duchess received us with great cordiality, at the door of the magnificent gallery of Rochester House; and it would be difficult to decide *which* sister exhibited the most consummate hypocrisy, and which was, in reality, least deceived by the exhibition.

“Think of my being obliged to have you, after all,” whispered the Duchess to me, after having disposed of Lady Carleton among a synod of loo-playing dowagers. “The Duke insisted that everything boasting, having boasted, or likely to boast, the name of Rawborne, should be invited to my party; and forced me to put the best face on the matter. However, his whim has enabled me to have *you*; which I should not have dared attempt, had not your dragon been appeased. By the way, I have been so civil to her, that she cannot refuse me your company to-morrow to dine at Weltjie’s. Fitzpatrick gives us a banquet; and Devonshire House and Rochester House,—the courts of Elizabeth and Mary,—are to be for once united. Lord Pembury took care to have your name on my card; and, what is more to the purpose, you have a ticket for the affair at Carlton House, and we will go dressed alike, as Virgins of the Sun. The cits call it a character ball. But Burgoyne has named it the ‘want of character ball.’”

“What right have the cits to call it anything?”

“Hush, hush, my dear!—Cits are just now the fashion. I have two of the City members here to-night, and an alderman’s wife and a half. The city is to do everything for the Prince, as it always does for rebellious heirs-apparent. It is to get his debts paid,—his improvements carried on. But I can’t stay gossiping, now.—I have fifty guineas on the pharoah table; and Lady Ailesbury won a septleva as I passed through the room.”

Although a topic peculiarly unfitted to Rochester

House and the Prince's presence, there were few other times and places where the embarrassments of the Prince were not just then discussed. From the day of attaining his majority, he had laid the foundation of expensive buildings at Carlton House, and of debts of honour and *dishonour* innumerable. He outdrove Sir John Lade,—he out-diced Charles Fox. Ten thousand guineas were expended in a single year on his toilet ; and between the turf and the tailor's shop, it was hard to say in what quarter his Royal Highness's pecuniary engagements lay heaviest. But the nation, or (as the London part of the nation is called) the Public, was satisfied. So long as he shared his hazard with Fox, his claret with Sheridan, all was well. The sordid respectability of Kew, or the petty-German-courtliness of Windsor, was lampooned by Wolcot, reviled by Junius, and burned in effigy by Wilkes's mob ; while the profligacy of Carlton House commanded the applause of theatres, and the grants of senates.

The “best of royal husbands and fathers,” with his experimental farms, and Handel, and Dr. Johnson, had not a huzza at command. The Prince, who threw away on the bouquets of his footmen thrice as much as the Berkshire farmer on his turnip-fields,—whose anthems were opera airs,—whose Wyatt was Nuovolieschi,—whose West, Sherwin,—whose Johnson, Dick Sheridan,—the PRINCE was the universal idol !

CHAPTER VII.

THE Carlton House gala, given professedly to promote the union, and consequently to betray to the world the *disunion* of parties, just then occupied the idlers of London. A *bal costumé*, a masquerade where the people were not afraid to show their faces, presented a novel feature.

To myself the occasion presented a thousand per-

plexities. That I had an invitation and was to accompany the Duchess's party, costumed *à la Péruvienne*, (the romance of Marmontel and the opera to which it gave rise, having brought Manco Capac into fashion,) was a difficult matter to declare to Lady Carleton.

"I almost wish we had chosen something simpler," said the Duchess, when describing to me the costume of a Virgin of the Sun; "or something in which my Bertin frippery could be useful to you. For alas! my dear, I cannot offer to make you free of Peru. Jewels I can lend,—brocades and embroidery give. But as to money,—thank the knaves—I'm now not worth a ducat!—Versailles and lansquenet stripped me of my last louis. Brag, pharaoh, and loo, have completed my ruin; and as my husband, at his father's death, paid off thousands of debts—and debts of thousands for me, on condition that the Duchess of Rochester should not renew the follies of Lady John De Vere, I have not courage to tell him that I am as much embarrassed as ever. This was the secret, by the way, of that empty-handed visit to Beaufort Lodge, which affronted the poor children."

I hastened to relieve her on my own account, professing myself sure of my Peruvian costume.

"But I fear you will be hectored by the Dowager; who will scarcely throw away so much money, without accompanying every hard guinea with a hard word.

"I would not be indebted to Lady Carleton, were her words as soft as eiderdown," I replied, proudly. "But she has in her care some money provided by my father for my London expenses."

"So much the better. And since you *are* rich, be fine. Beat your guineas out into tinsel for this occasion, and they will turn to guineas again. I predict some important conquest."

Great was my consternation, therefore, on applying to Lady Carleton, to learn that the "whole sum had been expended for my benefit;" in other words, that she had appropriated it to her own use for my board. My five guineas, too, had melted away.—I was absolutely penniless!

"You have only to write to Spetchingley," was the

cool remark of the Viscountess. “Your father could not expect fifty pounds to last for ever. Let Mr. Mordaunt know that an immediate remittance is indispensable.”

To admit to her my suspicions relative to the state of affairs at home, was not to be thought of; but, to apply to my good father, with such misgivings on my mind, was equally impossible. I resolved, therefore, to give up the ball; and, as a preparatory measure, pleaded indisposition, and next evening declined accompanying my aunt to the Mall. But no sooner had she departed thither, than my cousin Algernon unluckily made his appearance, and found me musing over a scanty fire and abundant vexations.

“I thought you had heard enough of Lady Carleton’s objections to your visits in Jermyn Street, during her absence,” said I, peevishly.

“Don’t be uneasy. I am sure of her forgiveness. I come in the pacific character of a herald from my father, or rather like Danæ’s Jupiter, I descend upon her ladyship’s roof in a shower of gold; a shape so *unquestionable*, that I suspect she would welcome even Lord Carleton back to life, if he rained guineas into her attics. In short, (for, *rhodomontade* as I may, I must come to the awkward phrase at last,) my father long ago deputed me to purchase for his beloved niece Betty, some dress or trinket worthy her acceptance; and the hundred guineas entrusted to me for the purpose, weigh heavily on my pocket and conscience. I have so little skill in ‘black, white, and gray, and all their trumpery,’ that, if you do not mean, coz., to be made as ridiculous as the old Princess Amelia, you will purchase your own gewgaws with your own coin of the realm.”

While giving confused utterance to this *tirade*, he placed a splendid purse on the chimney-piece.

My ready pride was on the alert.

“You would as easily persuade me,” said I, “that Parliament had voted me a Benevolence, as that Lord Rawborne was sufficiently himself to dream of making me a present!”

“You admit, at least, that from *him* such a gift would be only becoming; and what more proper than that Medway

and myself, acting for him on all occasions, should fulfil the duties of his position?"

"Pardon me. A gift from an uncle to a niece differs widely from a gift from a cousin to a cousin, in the *name* of the uncle. And, though you assume the interference of Lord Medway, I am convinced this trait of munificence arose wholly with yourself."

"You would accept it, then, more willingly from my brother?"

"Were I to say so, the inference would only be flattering to you. But uncle, cousin, or cousins, acceptance is impossible."

And taking the purse from the chimney-piece, I placed it in his hands; when, as Algernon again attempted to force it on my acceptance, the clasp unluckily flew open, and the four rouleaux fell into my lap.

"What is all this?" demanded the Viscountess, who, for the express purpose of espionage, had prematurely returned home. "I thought, Miss Mordaunt, I had sufficiently explained the impropriety of your receiving visits from young gentlemen during my absence?"

"You, perhaps, omitted to explain it to your servants, madam," I replied, greatly confused. "Once admitted, you would scarcely wish me to be guilty of the discourtesy of turning a member of your family out of your house."

"And what is the meaning, pray, of this?" cried my aunt, pointing to the gold. "Am I to understand—"

"Do not rack your brains, my dear good aunt, with surmises concerning the simplest transaction in the world," said Algernon, coolly. "My cousin, Harry Mordaunt, sent me yesterday from Oxford a credit on his banker for a hundred guineas, as a gift for his sister, which he wished her to receive with as little trouble as possible."

"Vastly considerate of my nephew—very kind of Harry!" ejaculated the old lady, enchanted to find the money present itself in a shape that warranted acceptance. "It could not arrive more opportunely; for the poor child was sadly in want of a remittance."

Meanwhile, I was on thorns. I had not courage to

expose myself to the inferences of my aunt, by declaring the truth; yet by countenancing the statements of Algernon, I was involving myself in a maze of deceit. At the moment, I fancied nothing would be easier than to return the money to St. James's Square, at the earliest opportunity. But scarcely had our visitor left us, when my aunt, in the interests of her strong box, took possession of the whole, "for necessary expenses;" leaving me only the disposal of a few guineas.

I was now thoroughly perplexed,—thoroughly angry. The splendours of the costumed ball were, indeed, dearly purchased. I took, however, the only honest step that remained for me, by writing every detail of the transaction to my brother Henry, requesting his advice and assistance. Harry, I doubted not, would see the impropriety of my incurring a pecuniary obligation of such a nature. But, to my great surprise, his answer assured me that there was nothing more indelicate in the cadeau presented to me, than in the liberality practised by my mother's family towards my brother Alfred; and he ended by saying, that "he had not thought me so *missish*."

I was disappointed.—I was infinitely vexed. I took a dislike to Algernon, through whom this wound was inflicted on my pride; and began to detest the thoughts of the ball at Carlton House, which, I doubted not, had suggested his impertinent generosity. I almost repented that I had not made my application to my second brother, Richard, rather than to my usual councillor.

Whether some evil influence prevailed in the name of Richard Mordaunt, I will not determine; but the brother of that name was as little a favourite with me, as the cousin. Not from any resemblance between the two. For while Dick laughed the world and myself to scorn, Richard laughed not at all; and while Dick drank, raced, and hunted, Richard was a model of sobriety and decorum.

At Eton, instead of getting into scrapes like Alfred, or good company, like Harry, he got into an exhibition, and had already distinguished himself at Oxford; and Richard the Demure, to the disgust of Dick the Down-right, was now studying hard for his degree. Had I

applied to *him* concerning Algernon's benefaction, instead of sending me the means of repayment, he would probably have favoured me with a sermon!

"We will assemble to-night in St. James's Square, on our way to Carlton House. The sight of our finery may serve to amuse my poor brother," was the arrangement of the Duchess for the memorable evening, the source to *me* of so many heart-burnings.

"Better not," was Algernon's rejoinder. "Lady Lavinia and her daughters dine with him."

"Then St. James's Square shall most certainly be our rendezvous," said the Duchess. "Those envious women shall see how handsome Lizzy Mordaunt and Lizzy Mordaunt's aunt look in their Peruvian costume."

At my uncle's house, accordingly, we assembled; and, having paraded our glittering splendours before his vacant stare and the sneers of the Shanstones, it remained only to marshal the group as it was to make its appearance in the ball-room. The Duke of Rochester being of the dinner-party at Carlton House, the Duchess was to be led by Lord Pembury, and Lady Pembury by Lord Medway.

"And whom will you have, child, for your *Caçique*?" inquired her Grace, whose spirits were too high for much regard to propriety. "There is Mr. Fitzirnham, and here is your cousin Algernon, waiting the honour of your election."

"Mr. Rawborne is nearest of Miss Mordaunt's height," suggested Lady Pembury.

"And Fitzirnham the more experienced cavalier," observed her lord. "Fitzirnham knows the exits and entrances of Carlton House as well as the page-in-waiting."

"Choose, child;—we are *all* waiting!" cried the Duchess.

I replied by curtseying to Mr. Fitzirnham, resolved not to bestow the smallest token of courtesy on my offending cousin.

"Ah! poor Algernon!" cried Lord Medway, laughing, as he rang for the carriages. "The old story!—A husband or cousin is sure to be laid aside for the sake of novelty."

“ You have caused a weighty duty to devolve on me,” said Fitzirnham, as he led me down stairs. “ I must take care that Miss Mordaunt does not repent the honour with which she has distinguished me.”

“ Pardon me for not allowing it to pass for a distinction,” said I. “ I wished to leave my cousin at the disposal of the Duchess, who is accustomed to have him call carriages, and take care of cloaks and hoods, at her bidding.”

A compliment, however, my new friend seemed determined to esteem it. He never quitted my side. He spoke to no other person ; devoting his time to announce by name, and explain by nature, the eminent individuals of whom that brilliant society was composed. I could scarcely have had a better cicerone. Mr. Fitzirnham was personally acquainted with the political notorieties of the day ; and, with regard to other notorieties, it was singular with what tact he managed to avoid every anecdote savouring of vulgar scandal, while pointing out, by characteristic traits, the most original in that world of originals.

Till Mr. Fitzirnham offered himself as my cicerone, no one had been at the pains of favouring me with a *catalogue raisonné* of the Blue-and-Buff party and their auxiliaries ; and at that period, Fox, Burke, Fitzpatrick, Sheridan, or Townshend, were to me persons of minor interest, compared with the Devonshires, Duncannons, Melbournes, Crewes, St. Johns, Cravens, Jerseyys, Bunburys, with whom their names were associated in the gossip of society. “ Fox’s Martyrs,” as they were called, stood secondary to his Angels.

Among the fairest present, by the way, was one, neither an angel nor a martyr of the Foxites ; the young and lovely bride of Lord Beauchamp, who, with her charming sisters, the daughters of Lord Irwin, and her relatives the pretty Talbots, arrayed as a group of Spanish Donnas, were the successful rivals of our Peruvian party. Little did I expect that, forty years afterwards, I should behold her in that very palace reigning, as Marchioness of Hertford and a grandmother, over the capricious fancy of royalty which her early loveliness had failed to enthrall.

"May I presume to inquire what you think of us?" inquired Mr. Fitzirnham, after watching my silent contemplation of the scene before me. "Are we not very brilliant?"

"Very *glittering*," said I, with an emphasis on the latter word; (for the taste for foil, French paste, and false stones was then disgustingly prevalent.) "Glittering as a winter's night, whose stars shine in proportion to its coldness."

"How?" said my companion, turning towards me with amazement;—"an epigram from lips which, like those in the story, ought to drop only pearls and diamonds."

"And what is an epigram but a diamond?" I replied. "Brilliant, compact, and capable of cutting even the hardest substances."

"I am beginning to be afraid of you!" cried Fitzirnham. "You were given in charge to me, as a lamb, requiring the wind to be tempered in pity to its tenderness. I find, on the contrary, the sagacity and courage of the shepherd's dog!"—

"Instead of a kitten, in short, a tigress. Mr. Rawborne ought to have prepared you for the failings of his cousin."

"I should not have believed him. But we are playing tapestry here among the dowagers, with a cotillon yonder not yet made up. May I hope for the honour of your hand?"

And for the first time, we danced together.

"You did not accompany the Duchess of Rochester to the supper at Mrs. St. John's, on Saturday, after the Opera?" said my partner, continuing the conversation.

"Perhaps you are not aware," I replied, "that I am not the inmate of the Duchess? My aunt is kind enough to take me to balls and places of amusement where I am likely to be entertained. But cards and politics afford me little diversion; at these suppers I find little else."

"Unprofitable enough, I admit," replied Fitzirnham, with a sigh. "But are you indeed that *rara avis*, the woman who, of all London, avows her contempt for politics, which the divinities with whom we are *pas de basque-ing*, esteem the one thing needful?"

"I was plainly brought up," said I. "Like most country squires' daughters, my occupations have been confined to reading Tillotson, and hemming dusters. In *our* house, politics, like liveries, came by inheritance. My father's tailor fitted his footman with purple and silver, and my father's daughters curtseyed mechanically to the toast of 'Church and King.' The Mordaunts are Pittites born. Under such auspices, do me the kindness to hope that I am no politician."

"But you will surely lend your aid to the Duchess, who has condescended to promise that she will canvass for our friend Fox at the approaching election?"

"I accompany my aunt when she commands it. If she considered me old or wise enough to be consulted, I might be tempted to tell her how unsuitable to her sex and rank I hold such an occupation as electioneering."

"I am glad you have the grace to yield the precedence to '*sex*,'" observed Fitzirnham, with a mortified air. "For my part, I think nothing unsuitable to a woman that approximates her interests in life to those of her husband. Many a statesman's wife would be better employed in copying his notes, and studying the authors whence *his* knowledge has been derived, than in squandering her time and money at brag and pharaoh."

"Are there no other alternatives?" said I. "The wife and mother of Coriolanus did not aid him by cajolments to obtain the most sweet voices of the citizens; or procure bands of hirelings to fling up their caps in his honour."

"No! they only betrayed him into abandoning the cause to which he had pledged himself," replied Fitzirnham, bitterly. "Perhaps because they had been taught to curtsey mechanically to the toast of Church and State. But how came you to find all this logic in Tillotson?" cried he, suddenly changing his tone. "And, above all, how come Aza and Zilia to be talking sense, when they ought to be eating ices?"

The foundations of acquaintanceship were thus laid between us. I rejoined the duchess, who, feeling perhaps that she had sufficiently exhibited herself as the companion of Lord Pembury, made the tour of the rooms, leaning

on my arm. She was always pleased that we should be seen together. The family resemblance between us was universally acknowledged; and she seemed proud of hearing it said, "Is not Miss Mordaunt the image of the Duchess of Rochester, as she was a few years ago?" Had they said twelve or ten, they would have been too near the truth to have pleased her; but it was satisfactory to learn that she had been as young at five-and-twenty, as Lizzy Mordaunt at eighteen.

Meanwhile, few things amused me more than the ingenuous questions touching the town and its pleasures, contained in the letters of my sister Jane; whom such matters as balls and beaux were beginning to interest. She did not, indeed, inquire, like the country-cousin of Mrs. Greville, "whether muffs and ponies were worn so *very* small;" but was curious to ascertain whether I did not feel ill at ease amid the formalities of the great world. Poor dear Jane! Little did she imagine that the "great world" I lived in was a world of Toms, Dicks, and Harries; or that the "honoured sir" and "honoured madam," exacted by the filial duty of the county of Leicester, were, in the parish of St. James, restricted to the correspondence of footmen and chambermaids.

Etiquette was, in fact, pushed from its stool; and already, the consequences of this abrupt dethronement were disagreeably apparent. Their armour thrown aside, the dismantled knights appeared in *cuerpo*; while the flowing robes replacing the farthingale of prudery, were somewhat loosely fastened. In the society of the Duchess, I heard and saw much to which I would willingly have remained blind and deaf.

Before I quitted the gala at Carlton House, Algernon, overcoming his ill-humour, condescended to invite me to join the dancers.

"Come with me into the gallery," said he, drawing me away from the play-room, where my chaperon had stationed herself the greater part of the night. "I don't want you to dance with me,—I don't want you to smile upon me,—I will give you leave to be as disdainful as you please. All I ask is, a promise that you will not accept the Duchess's invitation to drive out to-morrow."

“A turn in the Park in my aunt’s phaeton would refresh me after these hot rooms.”

“You will refresh yourself more by a day of rest.”

“But on what plea could I refuse, or where could I go to avoid her?”

“I heard Lady Lavinia Shanstone reproach you the other day with undutiful neglect of her invitations.”

“Those girls are so tiresome!”

“Clara, on the contrary, is a charming creature, if you will be at the trouble of making her acquaintance.”

“You have profited, then, my dear coz., by Lord Medway’s suggestion that you should not suffer both the tall heiresses to go out of the family for want of courage to attempt a steeple-chase?”

“You are wonderfully witty to-night. In my opinion, Clara is not an inch too tall. But I do not aspire so high. All this, however, is no answer to my request.—Will you oblige me?”

“Certainly not, without receiving rhyme or reason in exchange for my compliance.”

“I leave it to Fitzirnham and his friend Sheridan, to gratify you with rhyme. For reason, I have only to give, that neither your father nor brothers would approve of your being second to the Duchess in her Quixotic expedition.”

“After all, then, your mysterious preamble relates to a little harmless electioneering! Know, then, that I have not only pledged my word to Mr. Fitzirnham to use my utmost efforts in support of the Duke of Rochester’s friend, but that my aunt is to be supported in her canvass by all the most distinguished women in town—the Duchess of Devonshire, Mrs. Crewe”—

“Enough, enough! I might have guessed that I was too late. That you have pledged your word is sufficient,” cried Algernon, with bitterness. “Let us rejoin the Duchess.”

CHAPTER VIII.

ALGERNON, as I had found him before and often found him afterwards, was right in his conclusions. It was not, however, till three weeks after the opening of the Westminster election that I received from my brother Henry the following epistle:—

“ The fashionable intelligence of the newspapers informs me, that among the belles gracing the Covent Garden hustings, and winning partisans by her smiles, is ‘ the lovely and accomplished Miss Mordaunt.’ That this smiling lady may not prove my very dear sister Lizzy, I earnestly hope. I cannot reconcile it to myself that one so punctilious about receiving a trifling present from her mother’s brother, should have lent her face as a lure to the worship of the mob, and her ears to the profanation of its grossness; in support, too, of a cause to which those of her name and race are distinctly opposed. Write to me, my dear girl, and relieve my mind from so vexatious an apprehension.”

But so to write, alas! was out of the question. It was Lizzy, the daughter of that mild and modest housewife, Lady Betty Mordaunt, who had been courting coarse retorts from butchers and tallow-chandlers. It was my silly self who had been talking till I was hoarse, on subjects wholly above my comprehension. It was the proud Miss Mordaunt of Spetchingley, who had condescended to have her hand pressed and her waist encircled, for the honour of securing a vote for the friend of the Prince.

But what vilenesses become sanctified by custom,—what follies are rendered classical by the ennobling badge of fashion! Every day, during the six weeks’ continuance of the election, I saw the dignified Duke of Rochester, the amiable Mrs. Crewe, with fifty others of equal unimpeachability, launched into the vortex of noise and vulgarity; the wisest and best giving way to the enthusiasm of the hour, and playing fantastic tricks before high

Heaven and the High Bailiff! An election, at all times so exciting a crisis, was, in this instance, dignified by the presence of talent—beauty—rank. Even the Prince, in defiance of taste and propriety, affected to make the cause his own. Our mornings were occupied in animating the eloquence of Fox and his advocates, and our days in parading ourselves before the gaze of the populace. We dined almost in public; sometimes at Weltjie's, where the evening concluded in high spirits with high play. We wore the colours of the party; the “Fox medal” round our necks, the “Fox laurel” round our brows. Never was candidate supported by such zeal and fervour of partisanship!—

And all because it was the fashion! The fascination of Fox's address, and his devotion to the sex, secured him, far more than the liberality of his opinions or brilliancy of his wit, the support of those not already subdued by the favour of Carlton House and the enthusiasm of duchesses. The Prince of Wales displayed the Fox favours on his equipages; the prettiest pony-phaetons frequenting the parks were decorated with the same colours; for (alas! for the dignity of a reputation capable of agitating the snows of Muscovy and thrilling the nerves of the Convention) Charles James Fox was *the fashion!*

While the election proceeded, I took no heed of time. But when at last we became sobered by what usually produces intoxication—success, I found that six weeks had elapsed; and that summer, with its flowers and verdure, had made its appearance.

It was strange that not even Lady Carleton, usually so prompt in disturbing the even current of other people's satisfaction, had interfered to molest me. The Duchess having propitiated her, in the first instance, by enlisting her in our service, to canvass the loo-playing spinsters of Abingdon Street; the public prints secured her neutrality in the second, by hinting in divers paragraphs that, “at the close of the election, one of the fairest supporters of the popular candidate, the beautiful Miss M., of Spetchingley, would be united to one of the most influential adherents of the Blue-and-Buff party, Sir Claude Lovell, of Lovell Park.”

These rumours satisfied my aunt far more than the bulletin of the state of the poll, that all was going on right at the hustings ; and though I assured her, on my nightly return to Jermyn Street, that the gossip-mongers were at fault, she attributed my denials to my rustic bashfulness, and, satisfied that I was about to become the rich and fashionable Lady Lovell, joined more eagerly than ever in the cry of “ Fox for ever !”

Lady Carleton seemed to have forgotten the very name of De Vere Fitzirnham ; and, strange to tell, not one of the busy meddlers of our acquaintance was at the trouble of informing her that it was by *him*, and not by Sir Claude Lovell, Miss Mordaunt was escorted through the throng ; that *he* was my partner at the public ball given in honour of our triumph, at the Prince’s saloon at the Opera, and the private one, at Devonshire House. Sir Claude Lovell, it is true, was always sauntering in Rotten Row, to hand me from the carriage when we found leisure for a stroll in Kensington Gardens ; and dined frequently at Weltjie’s, when the Duchess was persuaded into the frolic of a club-dinner. But *he* was a party-man only in one sense of the word. After dinner, Sir Claude sank below the horizon, no one knew whither. Some said that claret was his Lethe, and that he vanished from sight no further than under the table. But this (never having sought him) I could not affirm. I only knew that, while he was said by the newspapers and the world to be paying me his addresses, I was not once disturbed in my growing intimacy with Mr. Fitzirnham by his appearance in any evening circle.

“ So you have actually robbed the wax-doll of its lover ! ” said the Duchess one night, as she was conveying me home to Lady Carleton’s. “ I saw something as nearly approaching to vindictiveness on its features, this morning at Epsom, as so insipid a face is capable of expressing.”

“ If by the wax-doll your Grace means Lady Pembury,” said I, “ her angry looks were probably directed rather towards her lord’s devotion to others of the party, than towards the common civilities of Mr. Fitzirnham to a person so insignificant as myself.”

“ If by others of the party your Missishness means my Grace,” said the Duchess, laughing at my heroics, “ I should think I had sufficiently accustomed her to the spectacle of Lord Pembury’s attentions, to have taken off the edge of her jealousy. But some women are incorrigible.”

“ Incorrigible, indeed.”

“ *D’autant plus*, that to the folly of jealousy, Lady Pem. adds the crime of ingratitude. Did I not, with my own voice and curtsey, introduce her this very morning to the Duc de Chartres ; and, while his Royal Highness’s *quatre valets*—*Cœur, Carreau, Trèfle, et Pique*, (y’clept by mortals the Dukes of Devon, Dorset, Bedford, and Queensbury,) tried to drag him off to the Stand, did I not detain him five minutes, opposite to her barouche, by an eloquent discourse in honour of her ‘ bugle eye-balls and her cheeks of cream ?’ But ’tis the last word I will ever utter in the woman’s favour !”

“ Did you observe how very high Lady Pembury was betting ?—Sir Claude Lovell won fifty guineas of her on the Derby ; and I heard my cousin Medway accuse her of having lost five hundred to the Prince.”

“ Did he ? The very surmise of such extravagance, on the part of a woman, will keep Medway from marrying for a year to come !—Had Algernon anything on the race ?”

“ Algernon seldom comes near me, now. I am told he is paying attention to one of the nieces of Lady Clifford.”

“ One of the Beaulieu girls ?—He cannot be such an idiot ! The Beaulieus, like that Fitzirnham of yours, are beggars ; and Algernon Rawborne, like yourself, has his fortune to make by marriage. He must put up with one of his Shanstone cousins ; just as *you* must make the best of Sir Claude Lovell.”

“ I, madam ?”

“ Yourself, child !—And, by the way, I have good news for you on that head. The Prince, my dear Liz, wishes you well. He thinks you handsome, unassuming, amiable, and so forth ; and being enchanted by your zeal during Charlie’s election, has your match with Sir Claude at heart. Now Carlton House being the only place where Lovell deigns to show himself of an evening, his Royal

Highness has allowed me to bring you to his next supper-party. An especial favour, Lizzy! I have never seen an unmarried woman there, except at the balls and assemblies."

"In that case, perhaps, I ought not to appear there," said I.

"Perhaps you are a little fool," rejoined the Duchess, patting me on the cheek with her fan. "Your good name will soon have a sufficient champion in the doughty Sir Claude."

"Even were it so," said I firmly, "what do I gain by endangering it in the interim? Mr. Fitzirnham assures me that—"

"Mr. Fitzirnham,—Mr. Fitzirnham!" cried the Duchess, now really angry. "Do not let me suppose that young gentleman capable of intruding his advice into my family, in contradiction to my own; or the forbearance with which I have excused his presence may come to an end. I rely upon you, Lizzy Mordaunt, to make your friend understand this. He has, perhaps, counted too largely on my toleration."

Fortunately, we were at the door of Lady Carleton, or I might have been provoked to an unbecoming retort. Once alone with my elder aunt, my thoughts were soon diverted by her accustomed queries. There was always some one thing she particularly wanted to know; her anxiety concerning which she tried to disguise by confusing it among ten thousand idle interrogations. On this occasion, she was in the best of humours; having been pottering away the evening with small quadrille and small negus, in some *coterie* of dowager twaddles, where she was overwhelmed with congratulations on the approaching marriage of her niece.

"Pray, my dear child," said she, as she bad me good night, "do not forget that, though others may have aided to forward this happy change in your prospects, but for *me* you would still have been droning away your days at Spetchingley."

"I trust, madam, I shall never give you cause to think me ungrateful," said I, cutting short a thousand unsatisfactory explanations. For I was eager to find myself alone in my once despised attic; eager to commune with

my own heart and in my chamber, but not, alas! “be still!” The long neglected ceremony of self-communion rendered me infinitely restless.

For I had now attained the climax of my Spetchingley ambitions. I had thrown off the authority of the woman I despised, the familiarities of the man I disliked.—I had visited London, and reached the highest point of fashionable notoriety. My portrait, after Sherwin’s sketch, was hanging in the print shops; my name cited in the gossip of courtly newspapers. I belonged to the supreme *coterie* of Carlton House; was the associate of Highnesses, Royal and Serene, of fascinating duchesses and fascinated politicians. Nay, even the distinguished suitors of whom my vanity had luxuriated in far-off visions, were beginning to throng to my feet. In addition to the courtship of Sir Claude, Lord M., the only son of the Earl of C., had made me an offer of his hand, which I had not dared avow to either of my aunts.

Yet I was miserable,—*miserable*, according to the most approved form of Miss-in-her-teenish desperation; nay, perhaps, of a still higher order of misery. I was in love with a man of noble character, and eminent abilities, without hope of return. The Foxes and Fitzpatricks, the Greys and Townshends, were to *me* no more than their painted effigies from the pencil of Sir Joshua; for these heroes belonged notoriously to a class to whom their neighbours’ wives are more an object of coveting than their neighbours’ daughters. But though I had been assured by more than one Mrs. Candour, of the Rochester House School for Scandal, that Mr. Fitzirnham was no otherwise to be distinguished from his gay associates than by a handsomer person and less reckless demeanour, I had, from our first acquaintance, discerned in him a thousand superior qualities, inducing the hope that his principles were regulated by a higher standard. I was satisfied that he was *not* in love with Lady Pembury; but without the slightest reason to flatter myself he *was* in love with Miss Mordaunt.

Jealousy is said to be a quick-sighted passion; and my jealous cousin Algernon was evidently as confident of Fitzirnham’s attachment to *me*, as of mine to him. But

Algernon, in this case, saw double. My affection was returned only with admiration. Fitzirnham paid many a tribute to my beauty, many to my sprightliness. But the tenderness which beauty and wit fail to call forth,—that tenderness, the sacred reward of humbler but better gifts,—neither trembled in his voice, nor melted in his glances. While Algernon's colour went and came, according to the sport of my caprice, while Algernon would assert, deny, revoke, with charming inconsistency, according to the dictation of my whims, Fitzirnham remained uncompromised. My frowns might make him laugh; my vivacity, weary. But never for a single instant had I moved him from his self-possession. Was not this a check to the presumption of the rising belle—a blow to the arrogance of Lizzy Mordaunt of Spetchingley?

It was idle for me to say, in my self-conceit, “It shall be otherwise—I will subdue the man at last.” All the arts at my disposal had been attempted in vain. I owned to myself without disguise or shame, that I had laboured my utmost to fix his attention; for Fitzirnham's position in the world was so far from solid, that my pride felt secure from the accusation of interested motives. Having refused Sir Robert Warley and Lord M——, and frowned upon Sir Claude Lovell, I felt privileged to smile upon the younger brother of a country-gentleman. I had perhaps even exceeded the bounds of prudence in my encouragement; for my desire to find myself in De Vere Fitzirnham's society, which had induced me to neglect the prohibition of my brother, was now about to render me a guest at the far-famed suppers of Carlton House!

CHAPTER IX.

THE fêtes just then projected in honour of the first visit of the Duc de Chartres to the Prince of Wales, were brilliant as became the hospitality offered by a royal host to a royal guest; and a thousand flattering voices were

raised on all sides to welcome a prince, destined in after years to be reviled as a disgrace to human nature. For historical characters, like drawings in sympathetic ink, assume their colouring according to the degree of heat to which they are exposed. As Regent and King, even the Prince was fated to fall from the eminence he had enjoyed as Heir-apparent: while the Duc de Chartres, on presuming to profess under the name of "Egalité Orleans" a practical interpretation of the Divine precept, that "All men are brethren," was fated not only to forfeit caste, but to lose head!—

Knew him, I did, and in the happier hour
Of social freedom, ill-exchanged for power;

applauded by the noble jockeys of Newmarket for his pertinacity in confronting the displeasure of the French Court, in order to witness the decision of his bets at the Spring Meeting; and lauded to the skies by the coterie of Carlton House, for his generous offer of relieving the Prince from his pecuniary embarrassments.

Hitherto, indeed, Madame de Genlis had succeeded only in creating discord in the *ménage* of a prince married according to his degree, rather than his inclinations. She had not yet involved him in revolutionary cabals; and the world of White's saw in him only a showy, brilliant, licentious man of quality, in whose mind were jumbled Wilkes and Liberty,—Newmarket and Eclipse,—Carlton House and Charlie Fox,—jockey-boots and hunting-saddles,—all and equally as parts of the Anglo-mania just then in vogue among the fashionables of France:—a vain, idle, dissipated man, as little of a conspirator as Colonel O'Kelly, Lord Barrymore, or the Duke of Queensbury.

It was fortunate for me that my inauguration into the coterie of the Prince occurred at a moment of such splendour. In addition to the parties at Carlton House, we had constant parties to Ranelagh, the Pantheon, Vauxhall,—or boatings to Richmond or Hampton Court. Lord Pembury, Fitzirnham, and my two cousins, usually escorted us; the Duke of Rochester being engrossed by his duties in the House of Lords, and frequent visits to

his invalid brother, Lord Hugh de Vere, who resided at a family-seat, called Penderells, on the borders of Hertfordshire.

From these visits, I observed that he returned not only depressed in spirits, but less disposed than usual to indulgence towards the follies of his giddy wife. Lord Hugh de Vere was a man of grave and conscientious frame of mind; rendered still graver by illness, still sterner by seclusion, and painfully susceptible on the score of family honour; and the mild benignity of the Duke was probably disturbed by the remonstrances of the valetudinarian against his culpable acquiescence in the levities of the Duchess.

It happened that, as an accomplished musician and devoted to the classical school of the art, the Duke was selected as a director of the concerts about to be performed in Westminster Abbey, in commemoration of Handel;—an undertaking for which he condescended to solicit the patronage of his wife. But Handel being an object of favour at Windsor Castle, Carlton House had, of course, declared itself in favour of the Italian school; and as loudly as the King and Queen applauded the “Messiah,” did the Prince of Wales applaud “La Molinara.”

“I am come to ask you to oblige me by attending the sacred concerts about to be given for the benefit of the Musical Fund,” said the Duke, entering a morning-room overlooking the old-fashioned Dutch garden of Rochester House, in which my aunt was accustomed to receive her privileged friends.

“Devote five days to psalm-singing?” cried she, looking for support to Lord Pembury, Colonel St. Leger, and Fitzirnham, who were her guests. “What have I done to deserve such a penance!—Your Abramses and Knyvetts are my utter detestation.”

“I have therefore much pleasure in promising you Mara and Pachierotti,” replied the Duke, “who have been engaged at my suggestion.”

“Poor dear Mara!—An encore in the ‘Horse and his Rider’ would be the ruin of her splendid voice,” observed the Duchess, turning to St. Leger.

“She has undertaken only ‘Pious Orgies,’—the song so charmingly given by your friend Mrs. Sheridan. I am sure you will feel pleasure in hearing her,” mildly interposed the Duke.

“Not at the risk of a rheumatic fever from the chill and damp of the Abbey,” said the duchess coldly.

“Which nothing, of course, but a coronation would tempt your Grace to overlook,” observed Fitzirnham, in a bantering tone.

“In *that* case, proper precautions are taken.”

“Not more than in the present,” said the Duke. “I promise you a seat secure from chill or damp.”

“Exposed rather to the perils of suffocation,” observed Colonel St. Leger in a low voice. “For you will be entitled to the honours of the Directors’ box, next to that of the Royal Family.”

“To be shown up as a public mark for the ungraciousness of the King and Queen!” exclaimed the Duchess.

“Their Majesties are too much interested in the success of the Commemoration, to render it an occasion for testifyign their political resentments,” observed the Duke, gravely.

“One of the objects, then, of my appearance in the Abbey, is to pay my court to Windsor Castle?—In that case, I am doubly pledged to the Prince to absent myself,” retorted the lady.

“By this inference, you have placed me under the necessity,” said the Duke, “of *exacting* your attendance. Do what you please about supporting the Fund, of which I am patron. But *one* morning, at least, of the Festival, the Duchess of Rochester must appear with me at the Abbey.”

As he slowly withdrew, the Duchess gazed after him with an air of undisguised contempt.

“Tell it not in Gath,” said Colonel St. Leger, rising to take leave, “that the Duchess of Rochester is recruited into the ranks of the Philistines!”

“Tell it not at Devonshire House, where you are probably going,” cried the Duchess, “or you will hereafter stand convicted as a false prophet. Silence does not always give consent; and, in spite of Lizzy Mordaunt’s

imploring looks, who I know is dying to go to the Commemoration, no Handel for *me!*!"

"Better not provoke him," observed Lord Pembury, approaching her work-table, and addressing her in a low voice, after St. Leger and Fitzirnham had bowed and taken leave,—"better not irritate him for a trifle."

"It is no trifle," replied the Duchess in the same confidential tone. "I look upon it as a trial of strength. Besides, I considered those five days to be safe and our own."

I heard not Lord Pembury's rejoinder. The words "safe and our own," startled me so completely, that I rose and descended a flight of marble steps, leading from the room in which we were sitting into the garden, where vases and statues stood thicker than the clipt yew-trees forming the foliage of the old-fashioned place.

"Safe and our own!"—Already my attention had been directed by the malicious comments of Lady Carleton towards the intimacy between the Duchess and Lord Pembury; and though my Spetchingley experience afforded me no grounds for inferring the possible extent of the mischief, I had heard enough, since my arrival in town, to know that evil, disgrace, and shame were to be apprehended. My cheeks flushed crimson at the idea that things might have been passing in my presence equally objectionable with the expression which had shocked me, observable to others, but hitherto unnoticed by myself. What suspicions might I not have incurred!—Might not Fitzirnham himself suppose me cognizant of indiscretions which had never even excited my notice!—

I trembled, more from indignation than fear; and on re-entering the book-room a quarter of an hour afterwards, and, finding her alone, I walked straight up to my aunt, acquainted her with my surmises, and earnestly implored her to prove them groundless, by acceding to the request of the Duke of Rochester.

For some moments, she was silent from surprise. "If it were not clear that you are set on by the impertinent interference of others," said she, throwing aside her netting, and leaning back on the sofa, "I should think it necessary to resent the indelicacy of your conduct. As

it is, I must be permitted to laugh at you, my poor Lizzy, as the cat's paw of a grimalkin, slyer than all her tribe. But I may not always, child, be in so indulgent a mood; therefore, let me beg—”

“Be assured,” said I, venturing to interrupt her reprimand, “that I am prompted on this occasion solely by my own observations.”

“In that case,” she replied, ringing and ordering the carriage, “do me the favour to return to Jermyn Street. I will have no spies under my roof. Make what explanations you please to Lady Carleton. But if we meet less, we may perhaps esteem each other more.”

My pride was now in arms. Though vexed to have offended the Duchess, I felt persuaded that, in the course of a day or two, her generous nature would suggest that she alone was in fault. Many days ensued, however, without a token of forgiveness. No visit—no note from the Duchess, with whom for six previous weeks I had scarcely passed six hours apart. Lady Carleton grew inquisitive, and insisted on knowing what misunderstanding had occurred between us. She began to fear that Sir Claude Lovell had withdrawn his suit; while Algernon not only resumed his visits, but a new offender appeared in the shape of a certain Mr. De Vere Fitzirnham,—one of the ragged regiment of younger brothers,—the abhorrence of all prudent aunts and speculating waiting-women!

Already, Mrs. Phillis had received and issued orders of exclusion against the intruder. But his card once deposited upon my table, I was satisfied that he had noticed my absence from my accustomed haunts, and considered me worthy of remembrance.

Fifty Sir Claude Lovells might have made their way to Jermyn Street, without affording me a fiftieth part of the pleasure!

But the day after Fitzirnham's visit brought the Duke of Rochester, with tickets for the Commemoration.

“I will not embarrass you by inquiring the cause of your sudden disappearance from Rochester House,” said he, taking me aside after having presented them to his sister-in-law. “Let me simply assure you of the unfeigned

pleasure it would give me to see you there again. I had hoped, indeed, my dear Miss Mordaunt, that when others with heavier claims could spare you, you might have been tempted to become the permanent inmate of the Duchess. Will you permit me to offer myself as mediator between you?"—

"If I am to infer the disposition of her Grace from my own," said I, trying to smile off my consternation, "mediation might only widen the breach between us. But I gratefully thank you, my lord, for your many tokens of kindness."

"You would prove your gratitude better, by returning to Rochester House," said he, taking my offered hand, "than by formal compliments. Or if you *must* compliment, may I not transfer your courtesies to the Duchess?"

"Willingly, if your Grace will undertake the responsibilities of the message," I replied. And I soon found that he had taken me at my word.

A few days afterwards occurred the first concert of the Commemoration, which I attended with Lady Carleton; and never can I forget the almost superhuman solemnity of those five hundred voices, echoing in harmonious diapason through the aisles of the old abbey. My very nature seemed subdued by the thrilling grandeur of the opening chorus: but could anything at that moment have increased my satisfaction, it would have been the Duchess of Rochester seated opposite, in a prominent position between her two eldest girls; looking not only handsomer than I had ever yet beheld her, but perhaps the most beautiful woman present on the occasion.

"Lizzy," said she, approaching me in her usual ingratiating manner, when, at the close of the oratorio, we were making our way with the crowd towards the sortie,—"let there be peace between us! I dare say I was wrong to quarrel with you—*you* were wrong to provoke it. I have missed you, my dear child,—I trust you have missed *me*; and now let by-gones be by-gones.—Lady Helena! go and pay your respects to Lady Carleton, and try to persuade her to give us the pleasure of her's and your cousin's company to-morrow at dinner, at Rochester House."

CHAPTER X.

THOUGH unwilling to reject the offered olive-branch, I had little inclination to become a permanent visitor to the Duchess. I preferred the routine of Jermyn Street, and the unaffectionate toleration of the Viscountess, to the hazard of witnessing follies, as impossible to approve as dangerous to condemn.

But Lady Carleton had by this time discovered, that an indigent niece, even though handsome and well-born, is not readily disposed of; and that her house had little attraction for the class into which it was her interest to introduce me. Sir Claude Lovell, in short, had not made his appearance in Jermyn Street, while Algernon Rawborne was a fixture in the house; and in the interests of her nephew, her niece, and her jointure, she decided that the Duchess of Rochester's invitation must be accepted.

“It was too late,” she said, “to raise objections.—The mischief was done. Fairly launched in the dissolute coterie of Lady John, it was there only I should meet with an establishment.” She gave me my choice, in short, betwixt Spetchingley and Rochester House!—But how to augment the burthens of my father, when every letter received from Jane and Helen, tended to prove that our fears concerning the state of his affairs were only too cogently grounded!—

While we were discussing the question of, “to go, or not to go,” previously to dressing for the dinner-party, Algernon arrived to give me the full benefit of his support. Without admitting my motives for declining the visit, I expressed my disinclination; and my cousin, probably divining my objections, affected to place them to the account of Carlton House.

“I admit the justice of your observations,” replied the Viscountess, “but Miss Mordaunt has advanced too far to recede. In defiance of my counsels, she chose, in the

first instance, to glitter her day among those whom the vulgar call fashionable. Had she contented herself with *my* humble sphere of society, this house would have remained her home. But after having branded herself in the public eye by association with all the notorieties of the day, she must rely on her beauty and the Duchess of Rochester to assist her in forming a marriage among those to whom reputation is a matter of indifference."

"But you do not surely wish to drive my cousin into the society of profligates and—"

"You do not, I hope, stigmatise the society of your favourite aunt by such a term?" interrupted Lady Carleton.

"Rather that of the Prince," said I, "to which the public is in the habit of attaching epithets equally injurious."

"All *that* is over!" replied Lady Carleton, shrugging her shoulders. "The Prince is now pursuing an honourable courtship. The Duc de Chartres complains sadly of the decorum of Carlton House. Our illustrious Benedick is, or is to be, a married man. Do you suppose the Prince has not sufficient influence in Parliament to legalise his union with a well-born, well-bred Englishwoman, of unblemished reputation?"

"Meanwhile," rejoined Algernon, "my cousin will still be a guest at Rochester House,—a circumstance, I am convinced, you will ultimately find cause to regret;—therefore—"

"We will discuss your profound convictions another time," observed my aunt, pettishly. "It is time to dress for dinner."

An incident occurred in the course of that evening, however, of which the poor Viscountess entertained little apprehension. Approaching me, while my two aunts were engaged in earnest conversation, Algernon made me an offer of his hand!

"I am fully aware," said he, "of the inadequacy of my position in life to your claims and desires. But in becoming mine, dearest Lizzy, you would at least be assured of a tranquil and happy home,—of a heart devoted to you, —of a hand prompt and strong in your defence. Even

these, I should not presume to tender to your acceptance, were I not aware that troubles you know not of await you at Spetchingley, and perils which, alas ! you are beginning to understand, under the protection of the Duchess. Mr. Mordaunt's affairs are, I fear, hopelessly involved."

I trembled !—His announcement of the fact I had so long anticipated, drew my attention more perhaps than it ought, from the generosity of his proceedings towards me. For poor Algernon immediately attributed my emotion to a cause more flattering.

" Speak !" he whispered, his eyes sparkling with awakened hope. " Am I so fortunate as to obtain your assent ?—Dare I flatter myself ?"—

" Alas ! my dear cousin, I am thinking only of my father,"—said I, deeply affected,—" my poor, poor father!"

" Forgive my abrupt allusion to circumstances so painful," pleaded Algernon, in an altered voice. " Were not your prospects so precarious, I should not have ventured to—"

" Away with such misplaced humility, my dear cousin," cried I. " Nothing can increase, nothing will diminish, the warm regard with which our first interview inspired me. But, my affection for you is that of a sister. Nay, to prevent the possibility of future misunderstanding between us, I throw off all womanly reserve, and frankly tell you that—"

" No ! do not tell it me !" interrupted Algernon, turning deadly pale, and laying his hand imploringly on my arm. " If I am to learn that you love another, let it be from other lips than yours. I have not courage to hear that you are about to bestow yourself on one for whose sake you will have more to renounce, than even as the wife of your cousin."

" You mistake me," said I. " I was about to confide to you that I had bestowed my affections on another. But I have not the slightest reason to suppose Mr. Fitz-irnham otherwise than indifferent towards me."

" You are not sincere, *now* !" said Algernon. " You cannot be so perversely blind as not to see that you are dear to him as to myself."

" Then why not avow his affection ?" said I, faintly.

“Because he is ignorant that the circumstances of your family are such as to reconcile you to a home of moderate brilliancy.”

A plausible explanation,—the only consolatory circumstance connected with my re-inauguration at Rochester House. The following day, Fitzirnham was one of a large party of dinner guests. Notwithstanding the animosity of the Duchess, he was established as one of the *habitués* of the house; for the result of the recent elections seemed to necessitate zeal and concentration in the Fox party. The popularity of Pitt, fostered by the favour of the King, had been the origin of disturbances in the metropolis; and as an evidence that politics were then “*in fashion*,” be it remembered that the hottest of the war was waged in St. James’s Street, between the chairmen of Brookes’s and the other clubs, who fought a tilting-match with their chairpoles!—

But, alas! while all the other guests of Rochester House marked that they had been aware of my absence by eager compliments on my return, Fitzirnham saluted me with an air of vague and unmeaning courtesy; turning away to enter into a lively colloquy with Mary Monckton, the sprightly and fashionable sister of Lord Galway.

Piqued by his indifference, I was delighted to find myself next to Sir Claude Lovell; who, roused from his usual torpor to a fit of sentiment by meeting me again, enabled me to conceal my vexation. It was in vain, however, I played off my girlish airs of coquetry; Fitzirnham remained imperturbable; and the witticisms of

“Little Monckton, the gay and genteel,”

(as she was aptly qualified in the verses of Bishop Marlay,) kept him and all around them in continued laughter.

The tiresome dinner was over at last; and the weather being sultry, the Duchess established herself for the evening in the book-room opening to the garden.

“What have you been doing with yourself this age, my dear?” inquired Miss Monckton, drawing me to the stone terrace fronting the house. “I was in hopes the dear Duchess had suppressed you altogether, to leave

some chance for my *beaux yeux*. But your absence rendered the brilliant Fitzirnham dull as a rainy day, and left Sir Claude most provokingly at liberty to bestow his tediousness upon all the world. So, when next you eclipse yourself, take him with you into the shade, in order to reconcile us to your absence."

"Surely you can afford dunce-room to a singe block-head, in your gay coterie of wits?" said I; "one penny-worth of bread, to so monstrous a quantity of sack!"

"Very well—very well indeed!" said Miss Monckton in a patronising tone. "Duchess, you really must not bestow this promising child upon so 'capital a calf' as Lovell. To be sacrificed to *such* a minotaur, is humiliating."

"You underrate Sir Claude," said I, piqued into taking up his defence. "Without pretensions to *bel-esprit*, he boasts that far more uncommon quality, common-sense; and has a great deal to say for himself."

"Probably—for as yet, he has said none of it!—To what account does your Grace intend to turn this charming moonlight night?" said she, interrupting herself to address the Duchess.

"I have nothing in view," replied my aunt. "My *ennui* is quite at your disposal."

"Could we not sup at Vauxhall?"

"Too late!—Had you sent me a little word this morning, we might have had boats and music."

"But can't we make it a brisk, send some one down to Westminster, and take what we find?"

"Some one is no one. My groom of the chambers is a Swiss; my footmen, Irish giants. I have scarcely a soul in my establishment whom I can trust with a message."

"The Duke is as good a manager as Garrick!—But what has become of your nephew Algernon?"

"Lizzy sent him away last night with eyes as red as poor Bentinck's over-rouged cheeks.—I don't expect to see him for the next hundred years."

"And Fitzirnham?"

"Is a vast deal too consequential to be troubled with commissions."

“Consequential?—Ridiculous!—I concluded you had him here for the express purpose of fetching and carrying.”

“I am not in a position to give the law,” replied the Duchess, with a heavy sigh. “Like His Majesty’s lieges, I accept the burthens imposed upon me, and cry, God save the King!”

“Fitzirnham has great abilities,” rejoined her friend. “’Tis a pity he was thrown out of parliament. All this, however, does not help us towards Vauxhall?”

“Our men are going down to the House. We should have no one but Lovell.”

“Can’t you send to White’s?—Lord Pembury is sure to be there. Tell him to get us Fitzwilliam and St. Leger.”

“As well try for the Prince, or Brook Boothby! And to tell you the truth,” added the Duchess, lowering her voice, “I am under restrictions. Were I to send to Pembury, it would be as the King did to the Duke of Portland, to tell him not to come.”

By this admission my suspicions were verified. There had been an explanation between the Duke and Duchess, and the difficulties of my position seemed removed. But, while the Duchess, who had taken Miss Monckton’s arm, was sauntering round the garden to whisper further secrets, Fitzirnham entered the room to look for his hat, and seemed startled at finding me alone.

“Miss Mordaunt has received so many compliments on her return to this house,” said he, approaching the window where I was standing, “that she will perhaps forgive the one sincere well-wisher who dares express his regret at seeing her here again. I was so happy to know you safe in Jermyn Street! Every day, as I looked up towards your windows, I congratulated myself that dulness was now the only evil impending over you!”

“And what have I to dread here,” said I, struck by his earnestness, “unless the caprices of a temper, which you and all the world have conspired to spoil?”

“Temper?” he retorted, with a contemptuous smile. “Faults of temper in a negligent mother, an unfaithful wife! But forgive me, I am trespassing too far on your

forbearance. Still, when I see you involved in a web of hypocrisy and deceit—”

“The Duchess and her friend are yonder,” said I, pointing to the garden where their white dresses gleamed among the yew-trees.

“I know it.—I have but a moment for warning, not *one* for apology.—Do not, I implore you, accompany the Duchess to Brighthelmstone!”

“Accompany her *where?*”—said I, fancying that he alluded to some scheme of diversion for the night.

“To Brighthelmstone,—where the Duchess means you to be her companion. The Prince has hired a house for the summer. The Duc de Chartres will visit him.—The Pembrurys—the whole set are to be there.—Avoid it as you would a pestilence!”

“But will you not explain how those whom you call your friends—”

“Hush!” interrupted Fitzirnham, pointing to the door leading to the dining-room. “They come! Resent my counsels if you will, but act upon them. I appear officious, impertinent.—No matter, so I but prevail with you.”

At that moment, the joyous laugh of Charles Fox resounded in the gallery, and the Duke of Rochester accompanied him into the room.

“The hat not yet found?” cried the former, who had been waiting for Fitzirnham that they might go down together to the House. “I would discover the source of the Niger in half the time!—Dear Miss Mordaunt, take pity on a silly youth who has lost his hat and his heart, and let us go.—Not another blush, not another smile, I entreat you; or Rochester’s poor horses will be kept waiting another hour.”

I would not have blushed could I have helped it; more especially as the Duke appeared displeased at finding me *tête-a-tête* with Fitzirnham.

“Duchess!” resumed my tormentor, addressing my aunt, who just then re-entered the room, “have you any commands for Brighthelmstone?—To-morrow being *dies non* with the slaves of the nation, I have promised to drive down with the Prince, and return the following morning.”

"I have no commission with which I need trouble you," replied the Duchess, evidently embarrassed.

"Commissions for Brighthelmstone, my dear Mr. Fox!" cried Miss Monckton. "I should as soon have expected Lunardi, previously to his ascent, to ask one's orders for the moon."

"Her Grace perfectly—"

"My dear Fox, allow me to retort upon you," cried Fitzirnham, taking pity on the Duchess. "The carriage has been twice announced, and the Duke is waiting."

And mingling apologies and adieus, the best-natured of men accepted the hint, and led the way out of the room.

"What is all this?—What mystery has Charlie blundered out?"—inquired Miss Monckton, the moment the doors closed upon them. "Have you committed a murder at Brighthelmstone,—or have you some other crime in contemplation, that you blush so heinously?"

"The crime of wishing to pass a few weeks there at the time the Prince, the Duc de Chartres, Mrs. Fitzherbert, Mrs. St. John, and fifty other people will be enjoying sea-bathing; whereas the Duke insists on carrying me and mine to Vere Court, where *I* insist on not being carried. I am therefore keeping snug my Brighthelmstone project, till it is convenient to me to be indisposed, and persuade old Warren that I cannot be cured without the aid of sea-breezes.—Of course, the Prince is in my secret; and as he tells everything to Charlie, who tells everything to everybody, the poor dear Duke was very near being introduced behind the scenes, instead of into a side-box."

"Apropos, to side-boxes," said her friend,—"are you going to the theatricals at Richmond House? 'The Way to Keep him' rendered The Way to Lose him, by the vile acting of Mrs. Hobart, as the Widow Belmour?—She has been taking lessons of Abington and Miss Farren. But yesterday, at rehearsal, all was so absurd, that I was forced to bite my lips till I came out of the House, pouting like one of Charles's beauties!"

"Or like one of Charlie's! And, by the way, if you see him to-morrow, pray scold him to death's door for his indiscretion about my marine villa on the Steyne."

"He could as easily keep his money as a secret!" replied Miss Monckton, yawning. And presently, finding all hope of Vauxhall at an end, she rattled away the Duchess to a brag-party at Mrs. Crewe's, which served to amuse them till sun-rise. In such diversions, my aunt never wished me to join. I was, therefore, left at home to ponder on Fitzirnham's strange inconsistency and alarming hints.

"After all," was the conclusion of my cogitations, "if I have ground to fear unpleasant results from this trip to the coast, it is but to get myself recalled to Spetchingley. Though I would fain relieve my father from an additional burthen, it must not be at the expense of his daughter's reputation."

These perplexities, like Jaffier's plagues, kept me all night waking; and, at an early hour, just as I had fallen into a sleep so deep as to prevent my hearing the Duchess's carriage drive back into the court-yard, I was awoke by her Grace's femme de chambre, Mademoiselle Aglaé, with the announcement that "*un beau Monsieur,—un jeune homme tout-à-fait comme il faut,*" was waiting for me in the library.

"At this hour?" said I, rubbing my eyes and starting up; and, convinced that either my cousin Algernon or Lord Medway was the intruder, I dressed in haste, and hurried down. But scarcely had I reached the threshold of the library, when I was encircled by two eager arms, pressed to an affectionate heart, and saluted by the earnest voice of my brother, Harry Mordaunt.

"How came you in this house?" was his first inquiry; readily answered by "Against my will, and at that of my two aunts." To my own question of "what are you doing in town," he replied that, the long vacation having commenced, he was on his way to Spetchingley.

"And Richard?"

"Dick travels characteristically, by the day-coach. *He* takes too much care of himself to venture into the mail and the night air. About the middle of to-morrow, you will, perhaps, receive a visit from him."

"Poor Richard!"

"*Poor* Richard,—who will end by being the rich man

of the family ; for he receives little, but spends nothing. You are happy here, my dear Lizzy ?" interrupted my brother.

"Very happy," I replied, in an embarrassed tone.

"How came Lady Carleton to make up her mind to part with you ?"

"My aunt is not rich—"

"That part of the obligation I settled beforehand. Not to leave my dear sister where she was ill at ease, I bribed Lady Carleton with half my allowance to receive you."

"Dear Harry !" cried I, throwing myself into his arms, and more gratified by the discovery of his generosity than disturbed by the meanness of my aunt.—"How shall I ever repay the kindness of so good a brother ?"

"By submitting to his guidance," replied Harry, gravely. "For I must scold you, Lizzy—and express my regret at the imprudence which rendered you a public mark for the—"

"Hush, hush,"—cried I, closing his lips with a kiss.—"Your warning came too late. But it was not given in vain. For the future, rely on my discretion."

"And this Sir Claude Lovell, whom the world informs me I am to have for a brother-in-law ?"—

"Certainly not by an alliance with *me*!"

"Then why accept his attentions ?—Why not dismiss him at once ?"

"The Duchess will not hear of renouncing the allegiance of the proprietor of four boroughs."

"Precisely what I apprehended !"

"You have nothing to fear ; I am no longer the simple girl I was at Spetchingley."

"Alas ! that you should say so, and that I should be forced to believe you !" ejaculated my brother.

"Do not put a harsh construction on my expressions. I mean only that I am no longer misled by the arts of the Duchess of Rochester."

"The *arts* of the Duchess ?—You alarm me more and more !" cried my brother. "Is it possible that a sister of our excellent mother could—"

"Not so loud !" said I, dreading lest the explosion of

his wrath might be overheard ; “ and not so violent. My aunt is, as you know, a woman of the world, who professes a superficial morality, the hollowness and danger of which I have been so fortunate as to discover.”

“ Would you had never come here !” interrupted Harry. “ I have half a mind to carry you off to Spetchingley !”

I trembled ! After my recent conversation with Fitzirnham, it would have been pain and grief to me to abandon London. But Harry’s next sentence relieved my fears.

“ Nor should I hesitate,” he continued, “ but that I have just received a letter from my father, bidding me lose not a minute in joining him. In half an hour, I shall be on my road. If, as I fear, his message regards some unforeseen embarrassment, to free him from which my co-operation is necessary, your arrival at home would be ill-timed. All this I shall ascertain on reaching Leicestershire, and nothing will be easier than to return and fetch you. Remember, therefore, my dear sister, that I rely upon your prudence, your *honour*, to apprise me, should anything occur to render your residence here—”

“ Cousin Lizzy,—dear cousin Lizzy !”—interrupted a strange voice ; and scarcely less to my surprise than delight, Lady Helena De Vere and her sister Isabella came bounding into the room.

“ At what o’clock are we to be admitted to mamma ? This, you know, is the day appointed for us to visit Sir Ashton Lever’s museum. The carriage was sent early—and here we are !” said Lady Isabella, throwing her arms round my neck. And thus I was relieved from embarrassing inquiries on the part of Henry, whom I presented in form to his little cousins.

“ Are *you* cousin Lizzy’s brother Henry ?” inquired Helena, frankly offering him her hand. “ And are *you* come to live with her at Rochester House ?”

“ No,—I am on my way to her home and mine, at Spetchingley Park.”

“ *Has* cousin Lizzy a home ?—Then why don’t she live at it ?” inquired Isabella, in all the giddy joy of a day’s

escape from three governesses. “It’s so delightful to be in one’s own home, with one’s own papa and mamma! *We* do so hate Beaufort Lodge, where we are moped up, away from every one. Lizzy, you promised to drive down yesterday and see us?”

“It was not convenient to the Duchess to lend me the carriage.”

“If I were you, I would stay in my own home, and have a carriage of my own!” cried the light-hearted girl, who was instructed in all possible branches of learning, but left in utter ignorance of the usages of society. “And then, you would often come and see us, would you not? You are almost as kind and good as papa!”

“Do you not see that Miss Mordaunt wishes to be alone with her brother?” said the sager Lady Helena. “Come away.”

But on this hint, my brother rose to take his departure; and right thankful was I to my little cousins for having secured me from interrogations, which it would have been painful to me to answer with the degree of sincerity due to a brother.

CHAPTER XI.

IT is always suspicious when a wayward wilful woman becomes suddenly amenable to the authority of her husband. I own my surprise was excited when the Duchess, whose engagements prevented her devoting the day to the little girls, desired me to take them, after viewing the museum, to visit their aunts Carleton and Shanstone.

“The Duke seems anxious,” said she, “that they should keep up the ceremonial of relationship. I fancy our beloved brother, Lord Hugh, preaches family union as the first of Christian virtues; for Rochester would fain have me live surrounded by my kindred, as if already installed in a family vault. As regards the girls, however, it is

easy to oblige him. Take care only that Lady Carleton does not stuff them with stale cake, or Lady Lavinia with Whitfield's staler catechisms."

We obeyed her; and if anything could surprise me more than her Grace's conjugal obedience, it would have been to find established at Lady Lavinia's that solemn formal personage my brother Richard. The Shanstones offered for him,—what he seemed little inclined to offer for himself,—an apology for his visit to his cousins, previous to visiting his sister; and I now discovered that a sort of controversial correspondence was kept up between Lady Lavinia and her nephew, which included denunciations against all the rest of the family; nay, her ladyship became, even in my presence, so personal in her condemnations of the wicked ones of her tribe, that I longed to inquire how Lord Medway chanced to escape being included in the commination.

A week after this day of surprises, the Duchess began suddenly to complain of indisposition; and when I heard her at the close of supper, one Saturday night after the opera, desire the groom of the chambers to take care that Dr. Warren was sent for on the following day, I was for a moment stupid enough to believe that the lady I had seen a moment before laughing and chatting, all grace and loveliness, with Colonel St. Leger and Mr. Grey, was attacked by serious illness. I offered to sit up with her; and instantly detected a playful smile of triumph in her eyes, at the idea of having deceived me.

Next day, the Duchess was *en petite santé*;—wore a cap,—her hair unpowdered,—exchanged her hoop for a *négligé*, and looked more charming than ever. Fitzpatrick, who happened to drop in as Warren's carriage drove from the door, addressed her a few impromptu verses on her indisposition, which, repeated that night at White's, sent all London with inquiries to the gates of Rochester House; and it excited no surprise when, some days afterwards, the newspapers announced, with their usual specious plausibility, that, "as soon as her convalescence permitted, the amiable and lovely Duchess of Rochester would remove to Brightonstone, for the benefit of sea-air." The stage-trick of this little drama

was so admirably got up, as to have deceived any one not admitted, like myself, to the rehearsal.

The Duchess, meanwhile, was kind enough to spare me the penance of seclusion which she thought proper to impose upon herself. She sent me under Lady Carleton's chaperonage to her box at the opera, and insisted on my accompanying Mrs. Sheridan to a ball at Devonshire House; and there, for the first time since our explanation, I met Fitzirnham. He was not what is termed a dancing man; and when he asked the honour of my hand, I saw that it was merely to insure unobserved conversation.

“Your brothers have been in town?” said he, as we moved together towards the set that was forming.

“Only for a few hours, on their way from college to Leicestershire.”

“Too short a time, I fear, to admit of mixing in the mobs of the gay world, or hearing the gossip of the West End?”

“My second brother is a saint; my eldest a philosopher,” I replied. “They might listen for ever to your scandal of St. James’s Street, without understanding one half, or believing the other.”

“Lucky they!”—ejaculated Fitzirnham, with a sigh. “Half *my* life is squandered in clubs.”

“*Political clubs*—”

“All clubs assume the mask of politics,—as one does a domino during the Carnival, to be at liberty to play the fool without loss of character. But we were talking of Mr. Henry Mordaunt. Did he see Lord Medway during his stay in town?”

“There is no intimacy between them. Lord Medway looks down on my brothers, as country cousins. Algernon was at Brighthelmstone when they were here, engaging a house for his father.”

“Lord Rawborne going down to meet his sister?” cried Fitzirnham with a clouded brow. “An excellent arrangement of his son!—You have a happy summer before you!”

“I hope so,” said I, affecting not to understand him. “I have never even seen the sea, and look forward to a thousand pleasures.”

“Better thus, after all; far better thus!” muttered my

partner, replying to his own reflections rather than to my observation. "Better, safe under the guardianship of an honourable man, than left at the mercy of the world—"

"Of only half the world, if you allude to Brighthelmstone," said I, unwilling to treat his remark seriously. "We are not sure of the Prince and Carlton House."

"You are sure of the Pemburys and *Rochester* House," retorted Fitzirnham, with bitterness, "as well as of the Duke of Queensbury—Barrymore—George Hanger—Lade,—all the shreds and patches of tarnished lace that hang upon the tattered mantle of Royalty! Already, the Prince, finding his party out of public favour, is growing out of sorts with politics; and finds the claret drunk with the asses of the Jockey Club as inspiriting as that he used to quaff with the brightest spirits of the age. He accepts excess for conviviality,—he mistakes—"

"Hush!" said I,—"yonder comes his Royal Highness, with a fair apology for his follies hanging on his arm. Rail as much as you please at me and mine. But stop short of high treason, and lead me to my place."

While we danced, the eyes of Fitzirnham were fixed upon me with melancholy earnestness. But my attention was soon claimed by the arrival of Sir Claude Lovell; who, having accompanied the Prince to the ball, thought proper to station himself behind me in the country-dance.

"So, Miss Mordaunt!—We are to have you at Brighthelmstone, I find," said he, after one or more audible yawns. "Don't you think it will be deuced good fun?"

"To what do you allude?"

"To Brighton,—bathing,—driving on the downs,—and all that sort of thing. I have built a phaeton not much higher than a wheelbarrow, and my ponies are a hand lower than Lady Lade's. Pray remind me that you are engaged to me for Lewes races!"

An angry glance from Fitzirnham, as he took my hand for our turn in the dance, seemed to reproach me with giving attention to a man whom nothing but an extra bottle of claret could have enlivened into uttering so many consecutive phrases.

"I say, Miss Mordaunt, you know I shan't stand your civility to that chap you're dancing with, if he follows the

Duke down to Brighthelmstone," said Lovell, when I resumed my place. "It won't do, you know, when we're once engaged."

"I do not understand you, Sir Claude," said I, anxious to get rid of him.

"Oh! yes, *you* understand me well enough. The Duchess has been trying her hand to make up a match between you and me. But it will be no go, unless the course is duly cleared."

The variation of my complexion probably indicated to my partner the annoyance from which I was suffering: for, instantly crossing the dance, he was beginning to address Sir Claude in no measured language, when, seizing his arm, I declared myself indisposed, and begged him to conduct me to Mrs. Sheridan. As we quitted the ball-room, I heard the voice of Lovell vociferating after me with the familiarity of intoxication—"I say, Miss Mordaunt, I'm in earnest. I say it will be no go!" and as plainly discerned, from the half-repressed ejaculations of Fitzirnham, that a quarrel between them was inevitable.

"Insolent coxcomb!" muttered he. "What encouragement can you have given him, to warrant such presumption!"

"None, on my honour!" said I, scarcely able to restrain my tears; and, as my agitation visibly increased, I felt my arm fondly pressed under that of my companion.

"Dearly shall he atone for every word and look that has distressed you!" whispered Fitzirnham, drawing me further from observation into a corridor decorated with flowers, that led towards the supper-room.

"Anything but that!" cried I.—"No quarrel, I beseech you!"

"His safety, then, is dear to you?" interrupted Fitzirnham, with quivering lips, casting an inquiring look upon my pale face and trembling lips. "But whatever insults Miss Mordaunt may choose to support, none at least must be offered to a partner of mine. Pardon me for leaving you."

"No, no!" cried I, clinging to his arm to detain him.

“ For my sake, dear Mr. Fitzirnham, let the matter be forgotten.”

“ Will you permit me to go in search of Mrs. Sheridan?” cried he, pressing my hand in his.

“ *Pray* do not leave me—you **MUST** not leave me!”—said I, sinking into a chair, but in my agitation half retaining his hand so as to prevent his departure. And Fitzirnham, becoming clearer-sighted to the origin of my emotion, no longer attempted to quit the gallery.

“ If I might presume to believe you interested in the safety of one so little worthy your consideration as myself,” said he, with an inquiring look—

“ Believe what you will. Only promise me that there shall be no renewal of the altercation?”

He hesitated.

“ To what am I not exposed!” cried I, bursting into tears.—“ Surrounded by dangers, which I do not understand,—appalled by mysterious warnings,—without a friend to guide me—”

“ But with a most devoted heart at your disposal!” said he soothingly. “ Give me but the valued right to take up your defence,—tell me only that no other man has a claim upon your affections—”

“ I heard you were indisposed, my dear Miss Mordaunt,” interrupted Mrs. Sheridan, approaching us, having been directed towards the gallery by the rumours of the ball-room. “ Perhaps you wish to return home?”

“ Indeed I do!”

“ Ask, then, for the Duchess of Rochester’s carriage,” said she, addressing Fitzirnham; “ and let us know when it arrives.”

And no sooner had he quitted us, than a fresh burst of tears convinced her something serious had occurred.

“ What can I do to assist you?” she inquired, in her usual sweet and gentle voice. “ I fear you have had some quarrel with that odious Sir Claude. So much the better! He was every way unworthy of you. Such a marriage would be a miserable sacrifice!”

“ It will never take place, dear Mrs. Sheridan!” said I. “ But a quarrel has occurred between him and Mr. Fitzirnham. When I am gone, try to prevent their meeting.”

“ Do not be uneasy. My husband has great influence over both. When I have seen you safe into the carriage, I will go in search of Dick, and see what is to be done. They shall not fight, if *he* can prevent it.”

“ Fight!—Do you suppose they entertain such an idea?”

“ Lord Edward Fitzgerald, who sent me in search of you, said something of an insult—an affront—a challenge. At this hour of the night, Lovell is always primed for a quarrel. However, here comes Fitzirnham with your mantle. Come quietly home with me, and—”

“ No, no!—Remain, I entreat you,” said I.—“ I am quite able to take care of myself. You will show me twice as much kindness by staying to confer with Mr. Sheridan.”

And at my renewed entreaty, she allowed me to accompany Fitzirnham to the carriage, which he announced to be in waiting. As we traversed the vestibule leading to the stairs, I overheard the angry voice of Sir Claude Lovell in vehement conversation with several gentlemen; and, without daring to turn my eyes in their direction, felt persuaded that they were only waiting the return of Fitzirnham to come to some serious explanation.

I had scarcely strength to descend the stairs—scarcely breath to reply to his reiterated inquiries. I felt on the point of fainting. Should Lovell and Fitzirnham meet again while the former remained in his present state of drunken excitement, and the latter in his mood of indignation, insults must ensue only to be effaced with blood!

When I reached the carriage and saw the Duchess’s footman holding open the door, a rash thought flashed into my mind which I did not pause to re-consider.

“ Come with me to Rochester House,” said I, addressing Fitzirnham. “ I feel too ill to trust myself alone. I *implore* you to accompany me home.”

Could he refuse such an invitation? In a moment, we were in the carriage together; rolling towards the distant wilds of “ the fieldes by Pancrace!”—

CHAPTER XII.

IT was not till we were on the point of reaching home that a consciousness of embarrassment apprised me of the indiscretion of my proceedings. In the course of our drive, after much solicitation from Fitzirnham, I had admitted so much of my feelings towards him as to convert his anxieties into perfect happiness. But as he seemed desirous that, for a time, our mutual engagement should remain a secret, it was impossible to propose our appearing together, at that late hour, in presence of the Duchess.

“I have little hope of obtaining the approval of the Rochesters,” said he. “But a few weeks may enable me to place my prospects in a point of view more worthy their indulgence. Till then, I must deprive myself of the triumph of proclaiming our troth-plight.” And feeling that a little preparation might be necessary to reconcile my own friends to the match, I readily acquiesced.

It was some relief, after parting from my now affianced lover,—from the friend—the husband of my choice,—to be secure that night from an encounter with the Duke or Duchess. But, alas! the following day, about noon, I was startled from my reveries by receiving the following billet from Fitzirnham:—

“Be not uneasy, my dearest and most amiable friend, whatever you may hear concerning my meeting with L——. A slight scratch, to which the surgeons give twice the importance that is necessary, prevents my flying to inform you that our quarrel is luckily attributed to political causes; and that the world which talks loudest where it is least informed, gives a verdict wholly in my favour. In a day or two, I shall be at Rochester House. Meanwhile, all peace and happiness be with you.

“D. V. F.”

Neither peace nor happiness, however, obeyed his injunction. I felt convinced that, to spare my feelings, he was making light of his danger ; and still more certain that enough must have transpired in the ball-room at Devonshire House, to involve my name in the affair. The Duchess having now reached the third or fourth act of her comedy of the 'Valetudinarian,' confined herself wholly to the house ; and by the few familiar friends who had the entrée of the boudoir, though all described the duel of the day as arising from a political squabble, I saw in a moment that my share in the dispute was suspected.

Among the rest, came Mrs. Sheridan ; who had probably been warned by Fitzirnham in what tone to refer to the scene of the previous night ; for she merely whispered, "Things had gone too far, my dear. Dick pronounced the meeting to be inevitable. But the wound is slight, and our hero going on as well as possible."

Fortunately, the Duke dined at the Club ; and the Duchess was at all times too much occupied with herself to take heed of the pre-occupation of others. But as we were drinking coffee together, a note was brought in which she perused with such evident marks of emotion, that I doubted not it contained the whole history of my folly and its results ! In this instance, my self-engrossment equalled the egotism of the Duchess. A moment after she had despatched her answer, her friend Mary M—— ran into the room, and after exchanging a few words with my aunt concerning the disordered state of her health, commenced an attack upon me on the subject of the duel.

"So demure as the child sits there over her knotting-shuttle," cried she, drawing upon me the attention of the Duchess, "after setting all Brookes's in an uproar!"

"And pray, how has poor Lizzy managed to influence the wiseacres at Brookes's?"

"By a faint,—which was, perhaps, a feint,—last night at Devonshire House."

"You never told me, child, that you had been ill?" said the Duchess, turning towards me.

"She thought, perhaps, you might be incredulous, just

now, on the score of illnesses," said her friend, with a significant glance at her Grace's *demi-toilette*.

"Jesting apart, Lizzy, what is the meaning of this?" demanded the Duchess.

"Jesting apart," interrupted our visitor, determined to take the narrative into her own hands, "there has been a duel between that good-looking adventurer, Fitzirnham, and that ill-looking numskull, Sir Claude Lovell, for the love of Miss Mordaunt's bright eyes. Sir Claude was not so sober or so civil as he might have been, last night at the ball; and Lady Pembury's quondam Sir Lancelot, was less forbearing. In short, they met this morning on Wormwood Scrubs, with Colonel Stanhope and Antony St. Leger, for their seconds. *Le beau* Fitz. has, at present, his arm in a sling; and if Warren and common fame say true, may chance to have his neck in a noose, after the Quarter Sessions."

"Do you mean that Sir Claude Lovell is dangerously wounded?" said I, throwing down my work, and starting up.

"As if you did not know it!"

Luckily, Fitzirnham's letter of warning occurred to my mind, to prevent my giving too hasty credence to her assertions.

"This is a most mysterious affair," observed the Duchess gravely.

"And whereas, the next heir of the house of Lovell happens to be a rank Pittite," resumed our guest, "who would immediately lay his vote and boroughs at the feet of the Treasury Bench, Brookes's has passed a vote of censure on the conduct of Elizabeth Mordaunt, spinster, of Spetchingley Park, as provocatress of a quarrel, likely to lay the doughty Sir Claude with his forefathers."

"And without explaining more distinctly the motive of the duel?" added my aunt, with her eyes fixed on my blushing face.

"A smile more or less, bestowed on one or other of her swains," answered her giddy friend.

"The 'one' or 'other' makes a material difference in my estimate of her culpability," observed the Duchess.

“Miss Mordaunt is aware of my desire to promote her marriage with Sir Claude Lovell”—

“It was precisely to such an intention, madam,” interrupted I, “that he alluded, publicly, in terms at once so coarse and humiliating, as to draw down my tears and the chastisement of Mr. Fitzirnham.”

“I wish to heaven you had found some other champion! But, in all honesty, Lizzy, *did* Sir Claude presume to attach disparaging terms to your name or mine?”

“On my word of honour, madam, he *did*; and Mr. Fitzirnham, who was dancing with me at the time, resented the insult, as he doubtless would had it been offered to any other partner.”

“I do not admit your ‘doubtless,’ or much admire your want of ingenuousness in not mentioning the subject to me this morning,” said the Duchess, coldly.

“I was unwilling to occasion you any additional anxiety during your illness,” I replied, provoked into offering provocation. And the hit *told*, for I saw an accusing smile reach the Duchess from the expressive lips of her friend.

“Next winter,” was her angry rejoinder, “I shall take care to purify my society from the presence of adventurers like Mr. Fitzirnham.”

“He was admitted into it, I believe, madam, as godson to the Duke of Rochester,” said I, with a degree of warmth, which I repented the next moment, on hearing the Duchess remark to her friend,—“a notable breach of the third commandment!—But henceforward, the Duke’s son, or *god-son*, sets foot in this house no more.”

The clandestine engagement in which I had involved myself, now began to weigh heavily on my spirits. Little as the Duchess had done to engage my confidence, I had no right to deceive her; still less to deceive the Duke of Rochester, who often expressed in my presence a wish that his daughters might resemble their cousin Lizzy. But though towards *him* I entertained unfeigned and undeviating respect, his virtues overawed me. From the moment of becoming his inmate, I had tried to conquer my girlish timidity in his presence; and now, more than ever, saw the desirableness of making him my friend.

But, alas ! I was no longer worthy to approach him with the same open smile and frank cheerfulness as before. I had a secret weighing on my conscience !

Could anything have consoled me for the painful predicament in which I was placed, it would have been the sympathy testified in Fitzirnham's position, by the most eminent men of the day. Charles Fox was a daily visitor to his sick-room ; and nothing but the political deference due from the Prince to a borough-holding adherent, prevented the demonstrations of his Royal Highness from being equally forcible.

Our correspondence, meanwhile, was uninterrupted ; and Fitzirnham had already acceded to my entreaty, that his explanations with my family should take place on occasion of his first visit to Rochester House.

Great, therefore, was my mortification, when, on returning one night from a party at the Duchess of Northumberland's, to which, at the Duchess's desire, I had accompanied her friend Mrs. St. John, I found Mademoiselle Aglaé completing the packing of my dresses, and learned that we were to leave town for Brighthelmstone at eight o'clock the following morning. Sleepless was that night —sad the journey of that morrow ! It appeared as if no other sixty measured miles of his Majesty's three kingdoms, could comprehend half the distance included between Bury Street and the Steyne ; and not even my first view of the ocean served to divert my anxieties.

Brighthelmstone, in the month of June 1784, was nearly as much the fashion as Brighton in the January of 1830. Though a hot dirty fishing town, without shade or shelter, it was the new place, the Prince's whim, the spot to be visited. Little did I imagine, as we took possession of a wretched house on the Steyne, opposite to one scarcely less miserable about to be occupied by the Prince, the site of his future Pavilion, what terraces, what parades, what squares, what circuses, were in the following century to grow out of those chalky cliffs, superseding in the annals of fashion and luxury the Bath of our grand-sires. Three machines and Martha Gunn at that time completed the appliances and means of Brighton bathing ; and in place of the new world of flys, libraries, baths, and

frippery, which, if there were justice in man, ought as much to be called Georgeville, as America America, or Washington Washington, we found only shingles, broken boats, torn fishing-nets, and whitings' heads.

But the Duchess, a dear lover of excitement, was delighted with the novelty of the scene, and sea-bathing and sea-boating became her passion. Though Bright-helmstone boasted even then its hundreds, where Brighton numbers thousands, she insisted on calling it rural retirement. "It was a place," she said, "where people could do exactly as they liked;" when, in fact, we could not put on our bonnets for a walk, without every soul in the town taking note of our proceedings.

As far as regarded myself, this *commérage de petite ville* was insupportable. The circle of which, for some time past, I had formed a part, was of so wide and distinguished a nature, comprehending celebrity, talent, rank, and fashion, that I felt at Brighton as if replaced in the narrow orbit of Lady Carleton's dowagers. Between the Duchess and myself, there was no longer genial confidence. Though at times fascinated by her grace of manner and sprightliness of wit, I could not love a person whom I found professing a two-sided code of morality. I saw that the best of husbands and loveliest of children were not her first objects in life; and was sometimes puzzled to guess what could be the real motive of her restlessness. It was scarcely possible, I thought, for a woman to be so enamoured of the notoriety derived from the homage of society—the newspapers—the mob,—as to render it her first consideration.

Our attention, however, and that of all Brightelm-stone, was soon engrossed by a report of the alarming illness of the Prince; attributed by the court-party to dissoluteness of life, and by his own friends to the despair arising from an unsuccessful attachment. The Duke of Rochester, who remained in town till the close of the session, wrote word that even *he* was now excluded from Carlton House; that his Royal Highness was in considerable danger; and that the gloom prevalent at Brookes's would probably deprive us of various promised accessions to our society.

I had hitherto supposed the Duchess to be actuated in her vehement party-principles by personal attachment to the Prince of Wales. But now, to my great surprise, I saw her more vexed than afflicted. Instead of entering into the disastrous prospect of losing a Prince from whose liberalism so much good was anticipated, she exclaimed that “it was very unlucky”—“very *tiresome*.” I had seen her growing jealousy of the superior influence of Devonshire House and its charming Duchess over the mind of his Royal Highness. Still, there was something unaccountable in her insensibility to the danger of one so much an object of interest to all around us.

One evening, on our return from a drive on the sands, we found Algernon Rawborne established in our little drawing-room.

“A most agreeable surprise, my dear boy,” cried the Duchess, cordially extending her hands. “But your face foretels the nature of a tragic volume. Do you bring us bad news?—Is the Prince worse?”

“My face wrongs the nature of my errand,” answered he, trying to speak cheerfully; “which is simply to see how you and Miss Mordaunt are going on.”

“As well as can be expected,” she replied, “considering that we are two town-beauties wrecked on a desolate strand. There is Lizzy, in honour of whose charms lances have been so recently broken; and here am I, a breaker of hearts of some dozen years’ experience, and not a compliment has reached us, (except by post,) since we bad adieu to the blessed smoke of St. James’s!”

“Except by *post*,” sounded in my ears so like an accusation concerning Fitzirnham, that I blushed deeply at the word. But her Grace’s thoughts were probably elsewhere, for she shortly added—“And what has become, pray, of all our valiant knights, now that Carlton House is turned infirmary?—Stanhope, St. Leger, Fox,—how are they?—Is Sir Claude Lovell heart-whole, and skin-whole,—and has his impudent antagonist found his way back to Rochester House?”

“I have been there only twice since you left town,” said Algernon, replying to her last inquiry. “Both times, the Duke was absent.”

“In the body or the spirit?”

“Gone down to Penderels, to Lord Hugh de Vere.”

“No wonder his letters are so short and sententious,” cried the Duchess. “Lord Hugh holds both me and mine in antipathy; for which misfortune I comfort myself by the belief that, like all hunchbacks, he detests everything good-looking.”

“He dearly loves your children, who have certainly no ugliness to recommend them,” observed my cousin, gravely.

“I fear you underrate the character of Lord Hugh.”

“*Saint* Hugh, as Lady Lavinia calls him; *apropos* to whom, my dear Algernon, I hope Lizzy Mordaunt’s report before we left town was not a true bill?—You surely have not been weak enough to abandon your cause with Clara Shanstone, for that smiling *nid-nodding* mandarin-like china figure, Lady Emily Beaulieu?”

“Miss Shanstone tolerated me only as Medway’s brother. Lady Emily Beaulieu has long been engaged to my friend Luttrell.”

“And what is Medway about?”

“Winning everybody’s money, and economising his own. Charles Fox lost twelve hundred to him at hazard, the other night.”

“After all, then, that frightful Lavinia Shanstone will live to be Countess of Rawborne!—A man so lucky at cards is sure to have his good luck crossed in marriage!”

“May he do no worse!” said Algernon, with a sigh. “The Shanstone girls are not attractive, but they are well principled; and good daughters make good wives.”

“What on earth is the matter with the boy to-night? He is as peevish as a sick guinea-chick!” cried the Duchess. “How long have you devoted your sighs to homeliness and housewifery?”

“Ever since my fashionable friends fled to Brighthelmstone, and left the town to wretchedness and me!” said my cousin, trying in vain to assume a livelier tone. “But as I have only a few hours to remain with you, and have a thousand things to say——”

“Say them, then; for ‘tis a thousand years since I’ve heard anything amusing.”

“I have no news likely to be *amusing*,” observed

Algernon, with a significant glance towards me, that plainly bad me begone, as he had something disagreeable to say to the Duchess. On which I hastened to leave the room, though unable to remove myself further than my own adjacent bed-chamber.

What could be the matter? I saw clearly that Algernon had intelligence of moment to unfold! At first, I had attributed his embarrassment to the annoyance of a first meeting with myself. But five minutes' conversation convinced me that my cousin's distresses were not of a selfish nature, but arising from the pain or peril of others. Perhaps he had heard bad news from Spetchingley? Perhaps Fitzirnham—I sank trembling into a chair—I knew not what to fear!—The murmur of my cousin's mild voice, in conversation with the Duchess, reached me at intervals as I clasped my hands upon my bosom; and I could scarcely refrain from rushing back into the drawing-room, and imploring him to tell me the worst.

But I soon discerned, from the tone of her Grace in reply, that his communication, whatever it might be, excited anger rather than sorrow. It was in vain that the persuasive tones of Algernon attempted to sooth her irritation. She was in a furious passion. At length, it was impossible to avoid overhearing her exclamations.

“No, no!” she cried. “Excuse your interference as you will, I look upon it as the height of impertinence. From your childhood, Algernon, I have loved you; and you should be the last to turn upon me now.”

“I *will* be the last;—but it is my duty to save you from the attacks of others. The world——”

“I brave it,—I *defy* it!”—interrupted the Duchess, in a still louder key.

“If you braved it,” replied her nephew, with firmness, “instead of being here, under the roof of the Duke of Rochester, with an innocent girl for your companion, you would be—”

“Living in open shame with a paramour! Yes!—complete your accusation. *That* is what you are desirous of inferring!”

“I would infer nothing to hurt or offend you,” answered Algernon, unsilenced.—“But I say again, in duty to

your husband,—your children,—yourself,—your God,—renounce this fatal folly, or you are ruined for ever!—The Duke's suspicions are awakened. Whether Lord Hugh or others have been the means of rousing them, is unimportant. I protest to you, on my faith and honour, that if Lord Pembury”——

“ Protest nothing, for I am not in the mood for patience!” cried the Duchess, with much bitterness. “ Algernon! your young heart is no fit umpire for such a matter. *You* know not what it is to have been frustrated in your dearest affections,—to have been born a titled pauper,—your daily bread precarious,—compelled to accept the means of subsistence by bartering your bright youth and warm feelings for the cold calculating prudence of a man wanting an heir to his decaying family! Even *there*, too, have I been thwarted. Those lovely girls of mine, a blessing to any other mother, are a curse to *me*. Vainly have I prayed Heaven for a son, to maintain my cause against these detestable De Veres; to be my vindicator with the world, my prop, my stay, my comforter. Every year has brought a poor weak girl, to be the recompense of a mother's sufferings! Without an heir to honour me, I am an object of contempt to my husband's family; and it is for this they persecute me. Pembury—you know it—was the lover of my youth;—the lover to whom I should have made a suitable and tender wife. But his father despised my poverty,—forbad the marriage,—sent him abroad to remain in exile so long as Lady Harriet Rawborne was undisposed of.—I married!—He was recalled to England; cajoled into an alliance with an heiress; and because I will not now reject his friendship, and drive him from my house”——

“ Not his *friendship*,” mildly interposed Algernon. “ It is because you will not sacrifice his *passion* to the peace of mind of the best of husbands”——

“ Even for that, must I be branded as an adulteress?—What right have you—what right has the world,—to deal with me so uncharitably?”

“ The world is a tribunal whose decrees are not to be questioned. As regards myself, dear aunt, none can

dispute *my* right to watch over the credit and happiness of one who was a mother to my childhood, and has been a sister to my maturer years. Medway may limit his zeal to a flippant retort, when he hears your fair fame called in question at his club ; for such is his nature. He would do no more for sister—mother—wife !—But it *is not mine*. And if again, after the warning I have ventured to give, I find you exposed to the insolence of a Lovell, or the sneers of a Boothby, I will take care to prove to the world, that one man of your blood can resent the imputation on your honour, and that of his family.”

The Duchess was silent, awed perhaps by his earnestness.

“ I forbid you !” said she, at last. “ Your life, Algernon, is worth more than my reputation, such as I have made it.”

“ Your interdiction is useless ! If you would spare your nephew,—your own remorse,—your misery here and hereafter,—make me the bearer of a letter to Pembury, terminating this unhappy connexion. One word from you will prevent his coming hither.”

“ But I am not so poor of spirit as to write it. No ! let the world which has talked so largely, talk on. Let Lord Hugh de Vere, who hates and calumniates me, pursue his vindictive triumphs. I am sick of society, Algernon ;—sick of hypocrisy,—sick of myself.”

“ And your husband ?”

“ He has his children to console him.”

“ As being also *yours*, may they not forfeit his affection ?”

“ Let him turn for comfort, then, to his precious son,—the son of whom he is so proud,—the son who affords him living proof of the immaculacy of his youth.”

“ All this is recrimination, not reason,” said Algernon. “ Let not my journey hither have been in vain. Send me back happy in the belief that you will seek happiness in the society of your noble-minded niece, rather than in the endearments of a profligate.”

“ You are vastly complimentary to the woman from whose feet you have been spurned !” cried the Duchess, with resentful malice. “ Lizzy Mordaunt was more than

a match, Algernon, for your prudence, when she made you her instrument for drawing on the attentions of—”

“ Not a word more !” interrupted my cousin. “ Her unspotted name must not be tarnished by contact with a theme like this. Should you relent, write to me. One word would set my anxieties at rest.”

“ *Adieu !*” was the sole reply vouchsafed by the Duchess.

“ We do not part in anger ?” demanded my cousin.

“ *Adieu !*” reiterated the Duchess. And I heard the bell ring,—the door close,—and a deep groan burst from the bosom of my imprudent relative.

But I was too much agitated, and, I confess, too indignant to hasten to her consolation. Solitary meditation was likely to be her best friend.

An hour afterwards, I re-entered the drawing-room, and was shocked by the heartlessness of her smiling exclamation of—“ Yes ! my dear Lizzy ! Algernon is gone. The boy was in so great a hurry to return to town, that he could not be persuaded to stay and sup with us. The Shanstones are gaining unlimited influence over his mind ; and he is beginning to preach and prophesy with a degree of unction, that Praise-God-Barebones might have been proud of.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE following morning, I awoke from restless dreams to receive a letter from Fitzirnham ; a happy letter, for it not only announced his complete recovery, but the probability of his arrival at Brighthelmstone.

“ You will soon be surprised,” he wrote, “ by a visit from the Duke of Rochester, who is about to escort his two eldest girls to their mother. Shortly afterwards, dearest, I shall make my appearance. My explanation with the Duchess must take place in the presence of her husband.”

Exhilarated by this welcome intelligence, I scarcely knew how to conceal from the Duchess the motive of my gaiety. I wanted to sing—to dance ; yet it was necessary to subdue my excitement. It was not for *me* to announce the approach of her excellent husband, her sweet children. It was not for *me* prematurely to disclose the secret of my engagement to the man she detested. When peevishly taxed with my unmeaning hilarity, I was forced to attribute it to the tidings contained in the papers of the day, of the Prince's auspicious amendment.

“Yes, our summer will pass less tediously than it promised,” she replied. “His Royal Highness will be here at the close of the week. The Duc de Chartres is expected for Lewes races ; and under such circumstances,” she resumed, “I mean to hasten my project for visiting Worthing, Arundel Castle,—perhaps Eastbourne, and Hastings. It will be as well to get over my little tour before the Prince arrives, and our golden fetters are fastened on.”

A tour ?—This was the first allusion I had heard to it ! A tour, and on the eve of the Duke’s arrival,—of the arrival of Fitzirnham !—

“To-morrow, at an early hour, Lizzy,” she resumed, “we will set off. I should have gone to-day, had not Algernon’s arrival last night proved an obstruction to my plans.”

Perplexed as I was, I found presence of mind to stammer out an inquiry as to the probable duration of our excursion ; and, on learning that it would extend only to two or three days, consoled myself with the hope that we should return in time to receive my little cousins and their father,—the harbingers of a still dearer guest.

All that day, the Duchess continued fractious and uneasy. She continually inquired of the servants for letters, though the London post-time was past, and she had no correspondents at Brighton. She even despatched messengers to the various coach-offices to inquire for a parcel, but in vain ; and, on my venturing at last to advert to the motive of her anxiety, she expressed a hope that Algernon might have left or sent a letter from the road. Aware that they had parted in anger, I could not

help fancying she had addressed to him penitent and pacific overtures, to which she was eager for the reply.

It was now nearly Midsummer. The weather was sultry; and all that day, a storm had been gathering in the atmosphere, which, towards evening, exploded. The Duchess made it the apology for her flurried spirits; congratulating herself, as the peals of thunder burst over the house and the lightning glared upon the sea, that our tour was refreshed by so welcome an antecedent. At an early hour of the evening, she proposed retiring, as we were to be up at day-break; and gladly did I instal myself in my room, and seize the opportunity to indite a long letter to Fitzirnham, explaining our projects, and my exquisite delight in the prospect of a speedy re-union.

The storm having subsided, my windows were thrown open for the enjoyment of the freshened breezes; and Mademoiselle Aglaé had taken her departure for the night, when I was startled by the sound of an arrival at the house. For a moment, the anxiety of the Duchess throughout the day occurred disagreeably to my mind. But I soon discovered that the visitor was no other than the Duke himself; who had made his appearance, unaccompanied by the girls. I heard him traverse the adjacent drawing-room with eager steps, like a person relieved from the restraint of a summer journey. I heard him decline an offer of refreshment from the groom of the chambers. I heard Mademoiselle Aglaé acquaint him that the Duchess would be happy to receive him in her dressing-room; and returned to the completion of my despatches,—adding news of the sudden arrival of the Duke.

At midnight, I closed my letter and my windows, retiring quietly to rest; nor was it till two hours afterwards, I was roused from my dreamy consciousness, half asleep, half waking, by a low knocking at the door opening from my chamber to the drawing-room. Supposing the sound to be accidental, I merely turned on my pillow. It was repeated; and, quickly rising, I approached the door and demanded who was there.—

“Hush! speak lower!” whispered a voice which I knew to be that of my aunt. “Unbolt the door, Lizzy, and admit me.”

I obeyed, and the Duchess, who had no light, instantly re-bolted the door, and taking my hand, drew me with her in the dark towards the window. There were no shutters to the room, and the straggling light of an overclouded moon enabled me to discern that she was in her night-dress, as if risen from bed. But when she began to speak, her voice was so changed by struggling emotions, that I felt compelled to take her hand in mine, to ascertain that it was really the Duchess who addressed me.

“Yes, Lizzy,—it is I!” she faltered; “the most wretched, the most undone of women, unless you interpose, to save me from a fate that would render my children motherless, and plunge my family into shame!”

“What, have you not a right to command at my hands?” I exclaimed.

“Not *this!*” she replied. “The concession I ask, is one only to be granted as the greatest of mercies.”

“Ask it, then,” said I, “that you may see how promptly I can comply with a request of yours.”

“Alas, alas!” ejaculated the Duchess; “this confidence wounds me to the soul. I have not deserved it, Lizzy,—I do not deserve it,—I cannot accept your rash generosity. No! you must hear all—you must hear the *worst*—before you undertake to be my preserver.”

And she fell, rather than sank, into the chair I drew towards her.

“My dear Lizzy—Rochester is arrived from town!” said she, after a heavy sigh, as if to relieve her oppressed bosom.

“I know it, Madam. Perhaps I was wrong not to apprise you, for I was aware of his coming.”

“And such a warning would have saved me from destruction!”—

“But my little cousins have not accompanied him; and I understood—”

“He has left the girls at Crawley; left them, and proceeded hither, to ascertain whether I am still worthy to receive a visit from my daughters. Lizzy, it depends on yourself whether they are brought hither to-morrow, or deprived for ever of the protection of their mother. A

letter has fallen into the hands of the Duke, without signature or address,—but, I admit, intended for *me*."

"And written by Lord Pembury!" I exclaimed in despair.

"Which, were it traced definitively to myself, would determine the Duke to throw me off,—to expel me from his house. He has told me so, Lizzy! When he demanded whether indeed those lines were addressed to his wife, he bad me pause ere I replied—for that an affirmative would be the last word he would hear uttered by my lips."

"And you answered?"—

"Had you seen him, pale with suppressed emotion,—had you seen the anguish quivering in his lips—"

"And you answered, Madam?"—I persisted, seeing her careful to evade a direct reply.

"In my place, Lizzy, you would have done as I did!—Were you the wife of such a man, the mother of such children, the occupier of such a position in the world, you would have hazarded everything for a chance of redemption."

"But you have not told me what answer you made to the interrogation of the Duke?" I faltered, scarcely able to breathe.

"I told him," said she, in a faint voice, "that I had reason to believe the letter was addressed to my niece."

"You *dared* not!" cried I, unable to repress my indignation.—"You dared not so calumniate an innocent girl,—the daughter of your departed sister!—You *dared* not brand me as a wanton!"

"Forgive me!" faltered the Duchess, throwing herself at my feet.

"This very moment, he must be undeceived," I cried, overmastered by passion. "No living being shall have a right to think thus of me!—I, great Heaven,—I, the paramour of a married man!"—

I had risen from my chair, but trembled so violently that I dropped into it again, while the Duchess abjectly embraced my knees.

"*You* are free," she faltered,—"*you* have none to suffer by your disgrace—"

"My father,—brothers,—sisters, are as susceptible of

honourable feelings as the Duke of Rochester," cried I. "But I have more than even these to grieve over my fall. I have a lover, Madam,—yes ! an affianced lover—" I paused in time,—the remembrance of my promises to Fitzirnham enabling me to preserve his secret.

" You refuse me, then ?" said she, with calmer gestures, and slowly rising from her groveling position.

" I do !"

" It is well," said she, preparing to quit the room. " I had counted too far on the goodness of your heart. But, since you will not save me, promise me, when I am gone, to be a mother to those children.—Promise me—"

" What—what is it you ask me !" I exclaimed, bewildered by agitation. " This letter which you bid me claim as mine, what do its contents imply ?—To what degree does it implicate my conduct ?"—

" I am myself uncertain," said she, gaining courage when she saw me moved in her favour.

" How came it in the hands of the Duke ?"

" We were to have breakfasted at Crawley to-morrow morning. Thither, Lord Pembury, whom I had appointed to meet us on the road, despatched a few lines of excuse, enclosing his letter to the landlady of the inn, with a request that it might be given to the waiting-maid of the Duchess of Rochester, the moment she arrived. Unluckily, the storm of this evening induced my husband to alight with the girls at that very inn ; and the blundering idiot of a woman, believing herself to be executing her commission, gave the letter to the attendant of Helena and Isabella, who placed it in the hands of the Duke."

" Gracious heavens !"

" Something must have previously occurred to excite his suspicions ; for, without hesitation, he opened it, and proceeded hither, resolved upon immediate explanation. Nothing but the presence of mind with which I parried his suspicions, prevented his instant departure preparatory to discarding me from his house."

" The letter denotes, then, heinous culpability ?"

" Culpability, in the eyes of an offended husband. It implies levity, folly, the crime of mutual attachment

between persons whom Law and Gospel ought to disunite."

"And you call this *all*,—and would impose such opprobrium on me without scruple!"—

"Not without scruple.—Think me not ignorant of the extent of the sacrifice I implore! But it is only the esteem of the Duke of Rochester *you* would forfeit. He has no duty to perform in exposing *you* to disgrace. Nay! he would doubtless use strenuous endeavours to prevent the secret from transpiring."

No, it is impossible!" cried I, shrinking, the more I considered the affair, from so odious an imputation. "I have no right thus to trifle with a name which I received unblemished from an honourable race."

"Hush!" murmured the Duchess, drawing closer towards me. "I have persuaded the Duke to retire to rest. But he might overhear us."—

"Better that he should thus become acquainted with the truth, than that you should have the task of deliberately undeceiving him."

"Do you suppose, Lizzy, I would *live* for the attempt? No! oh no!"—cried the Duchess. "I have courage,—but not for so terrible an ordeal. Farewell! when morning comes, I shall be beyond the reach of pity or condemnation. Farewell!"

"Stay!" said I, following and detaining her as she reached the door. "You say you have inspired the Duke with an opinion that this letter was addressed to your niece. In truth and honesty, Madam, how did he receive the intimation?"

"With unconcealed delight!—To find *me* innocent—*me*, the mother of his girls,—was all he cared for. It was only after the first moment of exultation, that he exclaimed—" She paused.

"Say on!" cried I, dropping her cold hand.—

"That Lizzy Mordaunt was the last woman on earth of whom he could have formed an injurious surmise," faltered the Duchess.

"And you would have me confirm him in his evil opinion?"

"The Duke will but inquire of you, with his charac-

teristic mildness, whether there is a letter waiting for you at Crawley. A sign,—a look,—an affirmative word, will suffice.—Deny it, and I am lost for ever!"

"On one more point, we must understand each other," said I. "Should I consent to this humiliation, the man to whom I have pledged my hand and heart must not receive them as those of a guilty creature."

"Most just.—And this affianced lover of yours is—"

"De Vere Fitzirnham!"

"As well reveal all to the Duke!"—cried my aunt, retracing her steps.

"No, Madam—Fitzirnham may be trusted;—nay—he *must* be trusted."

Again she remonstrated. But on this point I was firm; and when, terrified at the possibility of being missed by the Duke, she took leave of me for the night, I had accepted the fatal stigma of her guilt, on condition that she was herself to undertake an explanation of the truth to him whose esteem was indispensable to my happiness.

I have no words to describe the raptures of her gratitude.—I had scarcely patience to bear them.



CHAPTER XIV.

I QUITTED my room that morning so pale, so tremulous, so guilty-looking, that my accusation seemed written in my face. Already, I had ascertained that the Duke of Rochester was still in the house; and, on entering the breakfast-room and confronting him, his benignant countenance armed for the first time with severity, and his hand for the first time withheld, confirmed the reality of all I had been tempted to hope might prove a cruel vision of the night!

But, alas! it was no dream. The Duke advancing towards me, presented the fatal letter with a cold expression of apology, that a mistake on the part of the person commissioned to deliver it should have induced him to open

it; and all that remained for me was to curtsey acquiescingly, as I received the paper into my trembling hands. For a single instant, I felt tempted to fall at his feet, and implore him to suspend his judgment on my unworthiness. But a glance from the Duchess, who sat near us—her countenance almost convulsed with terror—served to restrain my impetuosity.

“I have only further to inquire, at what period it will be convenient to Miss Mordaunt to return to the protection of Lady Carleton?” demanded his Grace, with stately formality. “I have it at heart to bring my elder daughters to Brighthelmstone; and I am under the necessity of conveying them back this morning to town, till the Duchess is free to bestow upon them her undivided attention.”

“All these arrangements I will settle with my niece,” said the Duchess, in a deprecating tone—gasping for breath, lest the insult of finding myself thus dismissed, should prove too much for my proud spirit.

“I have no wish, my lord, to remain here,” involuntarily burst from my oppressed bosom. “A motherless girl, without counsel or protection, has too much to dread in—”

“My dear Lizzy, compose yourself,” said the Duchess, whose agitation, however, far exceeded my own. “The Duke has no accusation to form against you. All will be explained hereafter. All will yet be well.”

“All will be well when I am once more under the protection of my father; which, would to Heaven I had never quitted!” cried I. And, while I covered my face with my hands in an agony of tears, the Duchess hastened to take leave of her husband, and persuaded him to enter his travelling carriage, which was waiting at the door.

“I am saved!” she ejaculated, sinking into a seat beside me, as we heard the sound of departing wheels;—“saved, thanks to your intrepid generosity!”

“Do not thank me!” I exclaimed, putting aside her embraces. “Never was service more unwillingly rendered.”

“The extent of the obligation ought to plead for me!” cried the Duchess.—“Great as is the sacrifice you have made, far greater, Lizzy, is the service you have done me.”

“ You know not half the extent of the sacrifice ! ” I replied. “ Fitzirnham’s position does not admit of an immediate fulfilment of his engagement. Lady Carleton apprised me, when I quitted her house to be your inmate, that I must look for no further favour at her hands ; and this morning’s post has brought me a letter from my brother, acquainting me, (situated as we are, I can have no concealments from your Grace,) that my father’s affairs are desperately involved, and that Spetchingley is about to be shut up for a term of years, to enable my father to economise in some obscure retreat. Such is the moment at which I am thrown back, dishonoured on his hands ! ”

“ Lizzy, Lizzy ! —with such prospects, what could tempt you to reject the attentions of Sir Claude Lovell ? ” cried the Duchess. “ Is there no hope that he might be recalled, and induced to renew his overtures ? ”

“ This from *you*, who last night accused the disappointment of your early affections as sufficient apology for criminality ! ” I replied.

“ But starvation,—*ruin* ! ”—

“ Rather work for my livelihood as the wife of Fitzirnham, than degrade myself by a marriage with a vulgar-minded clod like Lovell,” was my reply.

“ My poor Lizzy, you talk like other girls of your age, ignorant of the sad realities of life, and credulous in the existence of poetical cottages, and graceful destitution. A woman in the station of Fitzirnham’s wife *cannot* work for her livelihood. She has to bear privation—to struggle with penurious gentility—to support the insolence of inferiors—the taunts of creditors ;—and, above all, the consciousness that she broke a noble spirit by withdrawing her husband from an opening career into the obscurity of household life.—This is what you would have to endure.”

“ And yourself, Madam,” I could not forbear replying, “ enjoying the highest triumphs of rank and opulence, the homage of society, the friendship of princes,—are you happier than the poor, needy, struggling wife you have described ? ”

“ I have, alas ! no longer a right to offer myself as an

example," said she, in a dispirited tone. " Yet, could I place myself in your position, I should not have courage to inflict suffering and privation on one so dear to me."

Such a sentiment seemed hollow from the lips of the woman by whom I had been placed in my miserable position. But at that moment, a note was placed in my hands, acquainting me that Fitzirnham himself was waiting at a neighbouring hotel for permission to make his appearance, and tender his proposals for my hand to the Duke and Duchess of Rochester. I gave her Grace the letter for perusal ; when, pressing her hands upon her forehead, she cried aloud, " Not yet ! Let me have some respite ! —I cannot see him *yet*!"—and so great was her agitation, that, instead of replying to Fitzirnham, I was forced to devote my whole attention to herself. Her recollection of the contemptuous treatment which Mr. Fitzirnham had for some time received at her hands, conduced, I verily believe, to restore her to self-possession. The apprehension that one whom she had injured and insulted would triumph over her, piqued her to exertion ; and, by the time I had succeeded in persuading her to admit him to a conference, the Duchess had assumed the semblance of nearly her usual haughty recklessness.

And it was thus, then, I was to meet him again !—Under what evil auspices, alas ! had our ill-starred engagement commenced !—His wound—my degradation !—Instead of the usual delicacies of feeling connected with an interview between an innocent girl and the man to whom she has pledged her faith, I was about to stand before him under the heaviest of accusations, and to entreat his co-operation in a conspiracy against his father's friend.

The Duchess of Rochester was, in fact, the calmest of the three, when I found myself standing beside Fitzirnham, with my hands pressed in his, and his eyes fixed earnestly on my face. The short moments we had passed together after our engagement, made it almost an untasted pleasure to gaze upon his affianced wife,—the wife whom he had purchased with his blood,—whom he *would* have purchased with his life !—

" I have just heard with regret, that the Duke of

Rochester is already off to town," said he, turning towards my aunt. "Is the Prince worse? I had good news of his Royal Highness last night, before I left London."

"The motives of the Duke's sudden departure were of a private nature," replied my aunt, carelessly.

"May I then inquire," he resumed, "whether any period is fixed for his Grace's return? I am most anxious to address to *him*, as to a person biassed in my favour, a demand for the hand of Miss Mordaunt; an honour to which I have so little claim save that of devoted attachment, that I would willingly entrust my cause to the partial judgment of a friend."

"You do not seem aware," replied the Duchess, "that my niece has a father living, whose authority on such a point must supersede that of relations, however dearly interested in her destiny."

"Accustomed to see Miss Mordaunt installed under your Grace's protection, I fancied your authority all in all," replied Fitzirnham.

"So little so," interrupted the Duchess, "that I am about to lose even the happiness of her society. Miss Mordaunt is likely to return to the care of Lady Carleton."

Fitzirnham turned towards me a countenance glowing with satisfaction at the intelligence.

"Meanwhile, lest you should at any time hear misrepresented by others, or be inclined yourself to misinterpret the motives of her quitting my house," resumed my aunt, in a most inappropriate tone of levity, "I have undertaken, Mr. Fitzirnham, to inform you, that Lizzy's offence against the Duke of Rochester consists in having kindly taken upon herself the proprietorship of a silly letter addressed to her aunt."

"*Offence* against the Duke of Rochester?" said Fitzirnham, looking infinitely bewildered. "Do you mean, Madam, that Miss Mordaunt leaves his house by compulsion?"

The Duchess was expressively silent.

"Or that the Duke of Rochester cherishes personal resentment against her?"

Not a syllable in reply.

"Your Grace has alluded to a *silly* letter," he con-

tinued. “ May I presume to inquire, (since it is one which Miss Mordaunt has not been afraid to avow,) the motive inducing you to require her responsibility ? ”

“ The offence of the unlucky letter,” said the Duchess, trying to disguise her embarrassment under her usual off-hand manner, “ consisted simply in containing terms of admiration, which jealous husbands seldom care to find addressed to their wives. In order, therefore, to pacify the resentment of the Duke, Lizzy Mordaunt generously accepted these civilities as offered to herself.”

“ Did you *see* the letter ? ” inquired Fitzirnham, turning towards me. “ Are you aware what imputations you may have incurred by your concession ? ”

“ No, indeed.—I simply acceded to the earnest entreaties of my aunt.”

Fitzirnham’s countenance fell. “ But if you are uneasy on that head,” I resumed, trembling at his gravity of demeanour, “ the Duchess will satisfy you by a sight of the letter, which, after accepting it from the Duke, I hastened to replace in her hands.”

“ If Mr. Fitzirnham thinks it worth while to imply an injurious impression, he must seek the fragments *there*, ” answered the Duchess, pointing disdainfully to the fireplace, where lay a variety of torn and defaced papers, but among them, certainly not the letter,—for I had never lost sight of my aunt from the moment when, snatching it from me, she placed it in the bosom of her dress.

“ I will not presume to pry into your Grace’s correspondence,” replied Fitzirnham. “ My position with regard to Miss Mordaunt, unprotected as she is, could alone justify my expressing even an opinion on the subject.”

“ Which opinion, give me leave to preface by the avowal of my surprise,” angrily interrupted the Duchess, “ that a person so well trained in the usages of society as Mr. De Vere Fitzirnham, should have formed a clandestine engagement with—”

“ That engagement, Madam, is not now the question ! ” said Fitzirnham, sternly. “ I came hither prepared to make overtures for the hand of your niece to the Duke of Rochester ;—to him—because his friendship for my

family has induced him to pledge himself that, on my forming a suitable connexion, he will push my fortunes in the world."

"His *friendship* for your family!" murmured the Duchess in a scornful but scarcely audible voice.

"And what do I find here?" continued Fitzirnham. "Instead of a cordial friend, anxious to establish the happiness of two young people who are dear to him, I find the object of my affections branded by the stain of infamy,—yes, *infamy*!—for the letter of Lord Pembury cannot have implied less, or you would have been less eager to transfer the accusation to another.—Is this the protection due to the innocent child of a deceased sister?"—

"To Mr. Fitzirnham, I feel myself in no way responsible," said the Duchess, gradually excited by his vehemence.

"You *are*, Madam!" he replied. "Your Grace *is* responsible to *me*, as the future husband of the virtuous woman you have injured; even as you are yourself responsible to God, for trifling with your duties as a mother and a matron."

"This comes well from *you*, Sir," cried the Duchess, unable longer to restrain her irritation. "If I did myself justice, I should command you to quit my presence—my house! But let me remember what is due to the blood of De Vere, even though flowing through an unlawful channel. That your mother's son should dare to stand up before me, and upbraid me with a breach of conjugal duty, is a sufficient attestation of my forbearance!"—

"I have not the honour of comprehending you!" said Fitzirnham, every trace of colour deserting his cheek as, by degrees, he began to attain her meaning.

"But there may come a moment, when even my patience will be exhausted," she resumed; "and in vindicating my honour from your aspersions, I shall but do justice to myself in closing my doors for the future against the illegitimate son of the Duke of Rochester."

"'Tis false!" cried Fitzirnham, starting to his feet;—"false as your own false heart!"

"'Tis *true*!"—retorted the Duchess, her countenance

gleaming with fiendlike exultation. “The proof is in my hands ;—ay ! Sir ; and supported by the ample confession of the Duke of Rochester.”

She could add no more. Fitzirnham, staggering to his seat, fell back in a state of insensibility.

CHAPTER XV.

THE Duchess of Rochester left the room before Fitzirnham recovered his consciousness ; and after the confusion and distress I had undergone, I felt that absolute solitude was as indispensable to my restoration, as to his own. Having persuaded Fitzirnham to return to his hotel, I resisted all the blandishments of the Duchess, and retreated into my own room to seek composure.

Oh ! how I felt, at that moment, the need of comfort—of counsel ! In such emergencies, how immeasurable appears to the motherless, the benefit and happiness of maternal protection. Wounded in my feelings—my reputation—my pride, I wanted more than ordinary soothing to restore my peace of mind ; and instead of this blessed solace, was forced to immediate action.

There was but one among those on whom I had claims of kindred, to whom I could turn for advice. My family were too deeply involved in their own distresses to admit of my troubling them ; but Algernon, my friend, my cousin,—my noble-hearted cousin,—was so well versed in the secrets of the Duchess, that I could inflict no injury upon her by taking him into my confidence. In spite of all that had passed between us, it was on *him* only I could rely : and not daring to refer the subject to Fitzirnham, I sat down and communicated in all minuteness to Mr. Rawborne the difficulties of my situation. The letter might reach him on the following morning. The day ensuing would, I felt convinced, bring an answer for my guidance.

That day, on the plea of indisposition, I passed in my own room. The next, by good or ill-luck, there arrived

at Brighthelmstone from France the Marquis de Conflans and Due de Lauzun, to announce the Duc de Chartres ; and to these gentlemen, the Duchess of Rochester was under the necessity of doing the honours of the place. I declined joining the dinner-party, for my pretext of illness was now rendered valid by two days of intense agitation ; and my aunt and her guests were still at table, when, suddenly, I heard a new visitor ushered into the drawing-room.

The welcome voice of Algernon begging that he might not be announced to her Grace, as his visit was expressly to Miss Mordaunt, sounded in my ears like a signal of release from a thousand evils !—

“ Did I reckon too largely on the sincerity of your professions ? ” I exclaimed, seizing his hand, and almost overcome by the kindness of this prompt reply to my letter.

“ You have done me justice, Lizzy,” he replied, “ in estimating my feelings by the generosity of your own. You have asked my assistance in the only instance where it could be painful to me to do you service. But that I am here already, must convince you how eagerly I comply with the slightest of your desires.”

“ I called upon you, Algernon, as a sister upon a brother,” I replied. “ Had not mine been engrossed by more serious duties, I should not have hazarded the chance of giving you pain.”

“ Would that I alone had now to bear it ! ” said he with a deep sigh, placing himself beside me on the sofa. “ And, alas ! that my prophecies should have come to pass. You well know, Lizzy, all I felt and feared regarding your journey hither. But with an actual engagement entitling him to control your movements, how, *how* could Fitzirnham sanction such a measure ? ”

I briefly explained the peculiar circumstances under which our engagement had taken place.

“ And tell me,” said he, “ since Fitzirnham is prepared to fulfil his pledge, what prospects can he share with you ? ”

“ I am still ignorant,” said I. “ He came hither to submit them to the Duke ; but the altercation which occurred with the Duchess, rendered it impossible for him to approach the subject.”

I then entered fully into the particulars of that unfortunate interview.

“I will see Fitzirnham the moment I leave you,” said my cousin, in reply to my communication. “I need not assure you, Lizzy, that the man to whom you have pledged your hand, is henceforward my friend. But you must not remain here. Within an hour of perusing your letter this morning, I arranged all with Lady Carleton. Do not expect to find her good or generous.—But she agrees to receive you into her house; and I came hither in my father’s travelling-chaise, that you might return in it to-morrow. Fitzirnham and I will travel back together. By to-morrow evening, you will be reinstalled in Jermyn Street. You must settle with *him* at what epoch you leave it again as his wife.”

I had no words to express my sense of Algernon’s kindness in these arrangements. “Shall you remain here with the Duchess?” was all I could say in reply.

“No, my patience with her was exhausted at our last interview. What she has done since, is past forgiveness!” he replied. “The injury inflicted on her sister’s child,—the aspersion cast on the fame of Mrs. Fitzirnham in presence of her son,—oh! Lizzy, Lizzy! how does the world warp and defile the noblest of natures, since my warm-hearted aunt can have degraded herself by such selfish cruelty!—But farewell! She must not find me here,” he continued. “To-morrow night, we shall meet in Jermyn Street.”

He left me,—and in how changed a state of feeling! Half my griefs seemed removed by the certainty of immediately quitting the roof of the Duchess, and securing free communication with one who was to be henceforward my all in all. Algernon had even persuaded Lady Carleton to allow me the attendance of Phillis; who, at an early hour the following morning, was to escort me back to town.

Any further interview with the Duchess seemed unnecessary. I heard her throughout that evening rattling and laughing with her foreign guests; while I was occupied in addressing her a few lines, to acquaint her with my plans, and Algernon’s generosity. Next morning, at

the appointed hour, Lord Rawborne's carriage appeared at the door ; and thus, there was nothing ignominious in my *mode* of quitting the house, from which I was virtually expelled.

After a hurried journey, I arrived in Jermyn Street ; and was accosted as I had anticipated by Lady Carleton, with—" Well, child, you have found out at last that all is not gold that glitters ? However, I have consented to take you back again. Henceforward, Lizzy, I hope we shall understand each other."

I found a note from Algernon, announcing that, at two o'clock the following day, he should bring Mr. Fitzirnham to be presented in form to Lady Carleton. But, alas ! my joy at the prospect was damped by a letter, re-directed from Brighthelmstone in the interim. Spetchingley, dear venerable Spetchingley, the source of my youthful pride, the cradle of my errors, was advertised *to be let* ; and a small house at Aldborough, in Suffolk, to which place my father had been accustomed to repair for occasional sea-bathing, had been hired for a term of years for the family.

" There has been some difficulty," wrote Harry Mordaunt, " in saving my poor father from arrest,—a public disgrace which, I am convinced, would have been the death-warrant of the poor old man. We may, therefore, consider his life as the gift of the generous friend who came forward to his relief with the sacrifice of his little fortune ! "

I trembled to read on. My presentiments already assured me, that this heavy obligation was owing to none other than the kinsman against whom my prejudices were so strong. And I was right. It *was* Dick Mordaunt, whose pittance of four thousand pounds had been forced on the acceptance of the Squire ; to whom, as head of the Mordaunt family, his sense of allegiance was as strong as that of a Highlander to the chief of his clan.—And this was the man I had despised as an interested hanger-on at Spetchingley !

" I need not assure you, my dearest Lizzy," continued my brother, " that had it been possible to relieve my father from his difficulties by any sacrifice of family pro-

perty on my part, the thing would have been instantly accomplished. But the entail and the law were too strong for us. A small farm, bequeathed to me specifically by my grandfather, is put up to sale to satisfy the more pressing creditors. The remainder of the estates are to lie at nurse in the hands of trustees, that the strictest economy may enable my father to lay aside the sum of £15,000, *intended* as a settlement for younger children, but never secured. Richard will be ordained in a couple of months, and take possession of the fine living of Spetchingley, which has been held for him; and Alfred is safe under the protection of Lord Rawborne. But, under these circumstances, my dear sister, judge how great must be my gratification that I did not peevishly remove you from the roof of the Rochesters! *You*, at least, are spared from witnessing the humiliations of your family. Heaven grant, my dear girl, that you may form a prudent connexion, to enable you at some future time to afford a home to Jane and Helen."

Under such dispiriting auspices was I to present myself to Fitzirnham; deprived of even the poor three thousand pounds I had announced to him as my fortune; the daughter of a ruined man, just rescued from arrest, and devoting his latter years to privation, in order to create a provision for his numerous family.

How easy is all this to write of now!—But how strange and mysterious a lesson it afforded then to my inexperience, to learn that the brother-in-law of a Lady Lavinia with half a million in possession, and of an Earl with a rent-roll of twenty thousand per annum, could have been on the brink of a gaol, from the trivial improvidence of having, for twenty years, exceeded his income by about five hundred a-year; and spared his pride the mortification of retrenchment, by raising money at high interest unsuspected by his family!

CHAPTER XVI.

At the period of which I write, there was unquestionably more space than now in society for the expansion of the passions. The excitements of social life have since been doubled, and the interests of public life quadrupled. I recollect the eminent men among whom I lived, going down daily to the House, less for the transaction of business, than for a brilliant display of oratory, to which the world was at leisure to listen. For, lo! Congreve rockets were not,—nor steamers,—nor rail-roads. The art of war comprehended that of politeness, when the guards of King Louis had time to salute with low bows those of King George. Family-mourning extended our sorrows to a tedious duration, and our courtships were dilatory in proportion.

Nowadays, a thing is talked of one day, and done the next, which used to be discussed one year, and attempted the year ensuing. The common-places of conversation are cut out. Hills are levelled, roads shortened, chancery suits curtailed, even whist itself abbreviated. Everything is less tedious than it used to be. But this increased velocity has not been without its influence on our moral feeling. The obligations of social life have lost their importance. People feel sure that a public stigma will be effaced by the mere throng of sensations, as a spot is trodden out by ever-crowding feet.

I was not much sillier than my compeers of the court of Queen Charlotte. Yet I remember having experienced emotions such as do not disorder the complexions of my grand-nieces ; and never more painfully than when I rose to present to Lady Carleton the husband of my choice, in presence of one who loved me far more than, according to the vulgar phrase, “to distraction,” for he loved me even to the self-command of sacrificing every feeling of his own, in order to secure my happiness.

Lady Carleton received Fitzirnham with a degree of courtesy that convinced me she was imperfectly acquainted with the slenderness of his fortunes. To have left me *tête-à-tête* with my lover, would have been contrary to *bienséance*. But Algernon had the charity to engage her in conversation, to afford to his rival the opportunity of the explanations he so ardently desired.

“You receive me as cordially as ever?” whispered he, on finding them thus engrossed. “Your noble spirit is prepared to overlook the dishonouring stigma affixed upon my birth by the Duchess of Rochester?”

“Why listen to the unsupported assertions of a vindictive woman?” said I, hoping to tranquillise his agitation.

“Would I could still withhold my belief!” ejaculated Fitzirnham. “Many concurrent circumstances have at times awaked my suspicions. But the fact being thus openly proclaimed, and from such a quarter, I had no alternative but to address myself on the subject to the Duke of Rochester.”

“And he replied—?”

“There has been no time for a reply; but my letter has reached him. The Duke slept at Penderels, on a visit to Lord Hugh de Vere, and is not expected home till to-morrow. If in his power to render a satisfactory answer, he will probably write.”

As simply as I could I now related to Fitzirnham the family events which would render me a penniless bride.

“I need not assure you,” said he, with a melancholy smile, “that this affects me only so far as regards yourself. Would to heaven I were rich enough to render you indifferent to your want of fortune. But mine, alas! amounts only to six hundred a-year;—my mother’s marriage portion, Lizzy,—distinct from the entailed estates of the family of Fitzirnham, and therefore honestly my own.”

“Can so limited an income inspire you with courage to burthen yourself with a wife?” said I, with a beating heart;—“an expensive, because, I fear, a useless wife?”

“Has Miss Mordaunt courage to renounce the luxuries of life, and share the attempt?”

“She has!” was my unhesitating answer. “Rely upon

every effort of my heart and mind to support whatever trials may await us."

"Enough!" cried Fitzirnham, triumph beaming in his eyes. "In spite of the malice of the Duchess—the enmity of the Duke—I am the happiest of the human kind!"

It was settled between us that, under the disastrous circumstances of my family, he should make no application to my father or brother till after his interview with the Duke of Rochester. But, at that moment, Lady Carleton, rising and coming towards us, broke up the conversation; and as she had unluckily formed an engagement for me to dine with her at Lady Lavinia Shanstone's villa at Petersham, our young visitors were obliged to take leave. Fitzirnham, meanwhile, wisely consulted her Ladyship's notions of etiquette by asking permission to renew his visit on the morrow, which was graciously accorded.

After their departure I entreated to be excused from my dinner engagement; pleading the agitation to which I had been exposed, as a reason for requiring rest and tranquillity.

"In *my* time, Miss Mordaunt," replied Lady Carleton, "young ladies were less free in admitting their proneness to tender emotions. You must, however, relieve me from the responsibility of leaving you alone in Jermyn Street, where I have had vexatious experience of your aptitude to receive visitors during my absence."

The visit was clearly inevitable. Lady Lavinia's carriage was sent for us; and, as we drove down to Petersham at the leisurely pace of a "serious" dowager's sober coachman and steady long-tailed horses, Lady Carleton found ample time for ill-natured hits, such as she had promised Algernon I should be spared. "She was not surprised," she said, "at my distaste for the dull respectability of such people as the Shanstones. After society so fashionable as that to which I was accustomed, humdrum aunts had little chance of pleasing me."

Little did she imagine how small my cause for predilection for fashionable society! Not, I admit, that I saw much inducement for preferring the narrow bigotry of

such a circle as that of poor Lady Lavinia; a ready dupe to designing persons, such as in all countries are apt to assume the mask of religion as the most imposing garb under which to prey upon the wealthy and weak-minded.

It is the custom to apply the epithet "priest-ridden" solely to Papists; though "parson-ridden" might surely be as fairly affixed to certain evangelical *coteries*; not followers of the gospel, but followers of its misinterpreters.

Our Petersham party consisted of Mr. Bumptext, Lady Lavinia's Whitfieldian Pope, and Mrs. B. his wife; Miss Glumm, a middle-aged spinster, half-toady half-housekeeper, kept to hunt for my aunt's mislaid spectacle-case, and see her daughters and tea-chest locked up; with a Mr. and Mrs. Quiesbury, a couple of croakers residing in the neighbourhood.

Unaccustomed to the jargon of people of their class, I confess that their familiar adaptation of scriptural language appeared to me little short of blasphemy; nor could I help admiring by what copious replenishments of Sir Obadiah's East India Madeira, Mr. Bumptext repaid himself for the grace in many sections, wherein he diffused the simple thanksgiving before meat, expressed IN TWO WORDS by wiser Christians.

"May I inquire whether your Ladyship attended the 'Conversion of the Kamschatkans' Meeting on Thursday, at Shoemakers' Hall?" he inquired of my aunt, mixing three sorts of fish sauce with his masked lobster.

"I did, Sir; and Mr. Wringthemout favoured us with a discourse of so edifying a nature, that I doubled the amount of my intended subscription," replied Lady Lavinia.

"And did you do anything for the fancy sale, Miss, for the benefit of the Baffin's Bay Tract Society?" inquired Mrs. Bumptext of my elder cousin.

"Only a few dozen pen-wipers," replied Miss Lavinia. "We had bestowed our pincushions on the sale in aid of a silver coffee-pot testimonial to Doctor Humdrum, on his retirement from his chapel; and my mother, with the assistance of Miss Glumm, is flowering an apron for the Auxiliary Autumn Sale for the Whitfield Burying Charity."

Such was the edifying tone of discourse among the sober guests of my serious aunt. After dinner, released from durance, I was permitted to accompany my tall cousins round the grounds, like a prisoner marched between grenadiers. But a dew having risen, Miss Shanstone, who was suffering from a cold, returned to the house; and I found myself for the first time *tête-à-tête* with my cousin Clara.

“Thank goodness she is gone!” cried Clara, taking my arm under hers the moment her sister was out of sight. “I have a thousand things to say to you, and a thousand questions to ask. Algernon Rawborne has often advised me to make you my friend.”

“With a sister of your own age, can you want a friend?” said I, startled by her abruptness.

“You know how strictly we are brought up; how estranged from all the pleasures enjoyed by other young people. Lavy, whose blood flows less freely in her veins than mine, and who is content to sit contentedly stitching in the parlour here, with my mother and Miss Glumm, from year’s end to year’s end, is shocked when I own that our glimpses of Aunt Rochester’s finery, and our reports of Miss Mordaunt’s conquests, fill my heart with envy. In short, Lavy is so *good*, that I dare not tell her half I feel or fancy.—*Of you I am less afraid.*”

“You do not think *me* too good?”

“Too good-natured, perhaps, or I should not rattle on so strangely. Tell me, then, dear cousin Lizzy, what is your opinion of Lord Medway?”

“You have known him longer than I have,” I replied, recollecting Lady Carleton’s frequent assertions that Lady Lavinia was desirous of making him her son-in-law.

“Longer, but, I suspect, not half so well. I see him only here, where, for his own purposes, he is playing a part. *You* meet him among those whom he has no motive for deceiving.”

“But why are you thus desirous of studying his character?” I inquired.

“That I may understand the surest mode of disgusting him!” replied Clara, with perfect openness. “Shall I begin at the beginning, and tell you my story?—Know,

then, that Lavy and I are heiresses (but at mamma's discretion) to six hundred thousand pounds.—Co-heiresses justice would make us; but my mother has so strong an ambition to see one or other of us (what the prejudices of her childhood induce her to consider the finest thing in Europe next to Queen of Great Britain) Countess of Rawborne, that I have reason to believe she has offered my cousin Medway a bribe of half a million, to induce him to overlook our other deficiencies, and accept one of us as a wife. Lavinia, as the eldest, has certainly the best claim. But unluckily, he has declared in favour of Clara!"

"I wish you joy!"

"Thank you! In case of such a marriage, I am sure I should want it. But, between ourselves, poor dear mamma is a bad calculator. She might have a lord a-piece, for her girls, for the same money; whereas, by insisting on this specific earldom, she will be obliged to put up with a country-clergyman for the Cinderella of the family; which clergyman (begging my dear cousin Lizzy's pardon for the liberty) is no other than Richard Mordaunt."

"My brother Richard engaged to your sister?" I exclaimed.

"Not absolutely engaged. But I am convinced he is waiting only to ascertain to which of us Medway's hand-kerchief is irrevocably thrown, before he puts in his claim to the discarded one."

"You mean that you are required to wait the decision of these gentlemen; then passively become their wives?"

"Lavinia will I doubt not resign herself to my mother's will. But for *my* part, heiress, co-heiress, or no-heiress, I intend to marry neither one nor the other. Algernon Rawborne I could have loved; Algernon I would have married. But, soon after your arrival in town, I luckily discovered his attachment to his cousin Lizzy,—cried a few girlish tears,—and uttered a few girlish ejaculations; but I had not the heroism to break my heart. His friendship and good opinion I prize more highly than ever; but he has no share in my determination to become neither Viscountess Medway nor Mrs. Richard Mordaunt.

And now I return to the spot I started from. In what way am I most likely to frighten away Lord Medway?"

"Affect expensive tastes and habits, and a *whole* million would not bribe him to your feet. If he thought you likely to spend more than you bring, his arithmetic would reply, take thirty thousand a-year from twenty-five thousand, I cannot; ergo, I cannot marry Miss Clara Shantstone."

"The experiment is worth trying," observed my gay-hearted companion. "Medway will be here soon. At this season, we see him constantly. When the hunting is over and there is nothing going on at Newmarket, he takes up his filial position in St. James's Square; and fancies himself devoting his time to poor Lord Rawborne, by passing his mornings at the Clubs and his evenings here. He is fond of boating, and our house is as good a half-way house as any other. Such is his ardent mode of courtship."

"He is said to have lost several thousand pounds at Epsom to the Prince of Wales," said I.

"I guessed as much," replied Clara; "for within the last two months his assiduities have redoubled. But I see lights in the drawing-room,—I fear we must return. Thank you a thousand times for your advice; and let me hope that some future occasion will present itself to cement our friendship."



CHAPTER XVII.

THE tide not serving for his return to town, Lord Medway deigned to accompany us by land; and, with my previous knowledge of Clara's intentions, I was not a little edified to hear him pishing and pshawing at the Tartuffism of the "serious" world we had left at Petersham.

"That fellow Bumptext," said he, "is little better than a thief who plunders in the name of the Lord. He

and his tribe batten on the venison and pine-apple of the rich dowagers, their dupes. The tents of Aaron are invariably pitched in the pleasant places, hard by the running waters."

"It is perhaps as well that Lady Lavinia's money should go to charitable institutions, as to Brag or Pharaoh," said I; perceiving that, thanks to the old Madeira, Lady Carleton was already dozing in her corner of the carriage.

"You are nearly as absurd as that silly girl, Clara Shanstone," cried Lord Medway, "who accidentally admitted to me to-night, that her mother spends five thousand a-year in charity; and that when her own fortune falls to her control she intends to double the amount."

"An excellent resolution!"

"Commend me to the imbecility of these missionary-meeting,—slave-abolishing,—Jew-converting ladies!—If a wife is prodigal of her husband's money in diamonds and equipages, there is at least something to show for it, and she does one credit in the eyes of the world. But a ninny who ruins her family to maintain a legion of greasy-haired hypocrites, crawling their sluggish way to the loaves and fishes, eats like a locust into one's substance, to no possible purpose. No! no pious prodigality for me!"

The confidences made me by Clara had already received confirmation in the minuteness with which Lady Lavinia, having taken me aside in the course of the evening, inquired the value of the Spetchingley living,—the nature of the parish,—the condition of the parsonage. I saw she was determined that no portion of her property should go out of the family; and that Lavinia was as much foredoomed to become Mrs. Richard Mordaunt, as Clara, Lady Medway. A few days afterwards, I received a letter from my worldly-wise brother, entreating me not to let the state of my father's affairs transpire among the Shanstones. As if *I* were likely to proclaim the downfall of Mordaunt of Spetchingley!—

The momentous morning arrived. But the hour appointed by Fitzirnham for his visit came and passed;

and no tidings of our expected guest!—Towards evening, my aunt grew jocose concerning “the desertion of my swain.” But so sure was I that nothing but illness could detain Fitzirnham at such a time, that I should have sent a note of inquiry to his lodgings, could I have done so without exciting the pleasantries of Lady Carleton. I retired to rest, satisfied that, early next morning, some satisfactory explanation would reach me.

Next morning brought, however, only the letter from Richard to which I have alluded; and the monotonous business of the day proceeded without interruption. Never had time appeared so tedious! I had no watch; but I sat counting the chimes of St. James’s, and the minutes between, till my head seemed distracted. The newspaper arrived—what cared I for the newspaper!—Yet my aunt, leisurely putting on her spectacles, began to rehearse aloud an account of a riot in Dublin, in which a respectable shopkeeper had been tarred and feathered; interrupting herself every moment to ejaculate, “What a terrible thing for the poor dear Duchess of Rutland!”—

She was still reading the paper, when a message-card was brought in, and, all impatient to learn its contents, I could not forgive the deliberation with which Lady Carleton proceeded to maunder over the wounds of Sheriff Kirkpatrick and the violence of the Dublin mob, while I sat trembling with agitation. At length, after completing her newspaper, she read aloud—

“Lady Algernon Percy’s compliments to Lady Carleton, and begs to offer condolence to her Ladyship and Miss Mordaunt, on the sad event in their family.”

The card dropped from her hands as she looked inquiringly into my face. What could this mean? Lady Algernon’s servant was interrogated, and could reply only that he had been desired to deliver the message and wait for an answer.

“Rely upon it, all is over with my poor brother!” cried Lady Carleton. “But how strange that Medway did not send for me, and that others should hear it sooner than myself!—I will set off instantly to St. James’s Square.”

I suggested that her footman would bring back intelligence before she could be half-way there. The answer

came, that "Lord Medway had been out all day,—that Mr. Rawborne was in the country."

"And my brother—my brother!"

"The Earl has passed a good night, my lady, and is much as usual."

Fresh perplexity, but, alas! new apprehensions. My name being especially included in Lady Algernon's inquiry, I began to fear that my own branch of the family must be the object of sympathy. My poor father might have sunk under the pressure of his misfortunes.

"This is the strangest affair!" exclaimed Lady Carleton. "Here we are, with the certainty that some calamity has occurred among those nearest and dearest to us, but without means of clearing up our doubts!"

On despatching a messenger to Lady Algernon's, we had the mortification of learning that she had driven down to dine at Sion House. But, while mutually engaged in conjecture and alarm, a newsman's horn suddenly interrupted our colloquy,—and amid the uproar of the vociferous announcement that followed, we could distinguish the name of the Duke of Rochester.

I had scarcely courage to ring the bell and desire the servant to buy an evening paper;—still less, to read on, when I saw the first column headed with "MELANCHOLY SUICIDE OF HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF ROCHESTER!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE Duke of Rochester,—the virtuous, pious, benevolent Duke of Rochester, a self-murderer!—The father of those helpless girls,—the husband of —. I dared not reflect upon it! Fitzirnham's absence,—the interview between them,—a thousand frightful surmises distracted my mind!

"Most inexplicable!" ejaculated Lady Carleton, who had been calmly perusing the statement in the newspaper.

I raised my pale face inquiringly towards her—

“That no one should have considered it necessary to communicate these melancholy facts to one so nearly connected with the poor dear Duke as myself!—I, whose presence of mind might have been so useful had they thought proper to send for me!”

“But the Duchess, Madam?” I at length was able to falter.

“According to the account in this paper, Medway started immediately for Brighton to apprise her. The Duke, it seems, committed the rash act in the course of the night. He was always a late riser. But his bell not ringing as usual, the servants broke open the door of his room, to find him lifeless,—weltering in his blood,—shot through the heart with a duelling pistol.”

“And is no motive assigned?”

“Read it yourself,” replied Lady Carleton, placing the paper in my hand. But I could not read. My sight was indistinct with horror, and the paper, escaping my hands, fell upon the floor.

“It would be, perhaps, but proper,” said Lady Carleton, after a pause, “if I went to Rochester House, to see what assistance I can render?—Lord Hugh is so miserable an invalid—the Duchess absent—the poor children—Yes! put on your hat, my dear, and let a coach be called. It will be the shortest way.”

“Indeed, Madam, you must excuse me,” said I. “I am completely overcome, and should be a mere incumbrance in such a scene.”

“This is no time for fine feelings, Miss Mordaunt,” cried my aunt. “The obligations you owe the Duke and Duchess, make it incumbent on you to exert yourself. I am under the necessity of requiring you to accompany me.”

At the mere menace of such a visit, a flood of hysterical tears came to my relief; leaving me in so complete a state of exhaustion, that Lady Carleton was compelled to admit the necessity of my lying down, while she proceeded to Rochester House. She was, however, sufficiently herself to issue orders before she quitted home, that the servants should undertake no message or letter for me during her absence.

It was almost evening when Lady Carleton departed,—it was no more than midnight when she returned; and who can express what those intervening hours were to *me*!—Such cruel incidents had lately crowded into my young existence, that I began to expect every moment would bring forth some new horror. My nerves were seriously affected. I trembled at a sound. Every trifling incident was fraught with evil portents!

At length, after a period that appeared endless, I heard the step of Lady Carleton ascending the stairs; and the awful nature of the scene she had been witnessing needed no stronger demonstration than the total change in her demeanour. She, usually so selfish, so trivial, seemed to have acquired sense and feeling in the presence of death!

“Is the Duchess arrived in town?” was my first inquiry.

“No, my dear. Medway is returned. But my sister was in such a state that he did not think it prudent to move her; particularly to Rochester House, where so much that is afflicting awaits her.”

“Has anything transpired concerning the motives of the act?” said I, taking Lady Carleton’s hand, as if to entreat her to deal mercifully with me in the disclosure.

“The inquest will not take place till to-morrow at day-break. The coroner was engaged elsewhere, in an important case involving a charge of murder.”

“Did the Duke leave no paper—no letter?”

“That part of the affair is still involved in mystery. One servant declares that on entering the room and discovering the body, he saw a letter lying on the table, which in the confusion seems to have disappeared; for the Duke’s confidential valet, who followed the man on his giving the alarm, protests that no letter was there. Lord Hugh—for I cannot yet learn to call him the Duke—has cross-examined these people, minutely. Ill and broken-hearted as he is, nothing can exceed the good sense of his proceedings. He, whom we have always considered in the family a discontented, ailing, hypochondriac, turns out to be a man of stronger mind than his brother, and with a heart equally tender.”

“And does he form no conclusion respecting the origin of this dreadful act?”

“He will express no opinion till after the inquest. It seems that the Duke, who passed the preceding day with him at Penderels, was in a state of deep despondency. On arriving in town yesterday morning, he was seen at Brookes’s, where nothing unusual was remarked in his conduct. But he is stated to have previously had a long interview in his library with Mr. Fitzirnham; in the course of which, their voices ran so high as to reach the servants.”

“It is, then, as I feared!”

“The Duke dressed for dinner, dined with Lord John Cavendish, was observed to be dull and absent; and when the rest of the party repaired to Carlton House in the evening, excused himself on the score of indisposition, and returned home.”

“Alone?”

“His own carriage not being in waiting, Lord St. Asaph set him down. On arriving at home, several notes, cards, and letters were given him by his own man; all of which have been found, with the exception of one;—a letter brought by a servant in a plain livery, which it is supposed he must have destroyed.”

“And the Duke was not seen afterwards?”—

“Only by his valet-de-chambre. He desired the man not to sit up, as he had letters to write; and the servants went quietly to bed. Not the slightest suspicion, in short, was excited till this morning, when the body was discovered exactly according to the statement you saw in the newspapers. The medical men called in have decided, from appearances, that he must have committed the rash act at about two o’clock in the morning.”

“What tortures of mind must he have undergone in the interim!” said I, unguardedly.

“What reason have you for supposing so?” retorted my aunt, sharply.

“What other cause can be assigned for the fatal catastrophe?” I replied, more cautiously.

“Aberration of intellect!” replied my aunt in a decided tone.

“Is there insanity, then, in the De Vere family?”

"No matter! Insanity is often known to pass over a generation or two. Some ancestor of the Duke's was probably afflicted, of whom we have never happened to hear. At all events, my dear Lizzy," continued my aunt, lowering her voice, "such is the opinion I advise you to express, if interrogated on the subject. Such is the cue of the Rawborne family. People will be on the watch to catch up every syllable that falls from *us*."

"No syllable could ever fall from my lips injurious to the Duke of Rochester," said I, mournfully.

"But the Duchess?" significantly demanded my aunt. "Already, child, the newspapers are at work. I need not remind you how dearly, in these times, they delight in everything attributing misconduct to the nobility! Old Muffle the apothecary, who dropped in at Rochester House, on pretence of visiting a sick housemaid, but in reality to find out what was going on, for the amusement of his patients to-morrow, whispered to me that there was an attack upon the Duchess and Lord Pembury, in a government evening paper; charging them in express terms with the death of the poor dear Duke, and ending with a furious attack upon the society and satellites of the Prince of Wales."

"Everything in England is made a matter of politics!" said I, scarce knowing what to answer.

"Any imputation upon the Duchess at such a time, however, might be productive of serious results."

"She will surely not be in a state of mind to read a newspaper?"

"I do not refer to her feelings, but to her fortunes. The will cannot be opened till after the inquest; as in case of a verdict of *felo de se*, (a thing, certainly, unprecedented in the Duke's rank of life,—such things are never brought in suicide, except for the lowest rabble,) it would become inoperative; and, *till* the will is opened, it is impossible to say how far my poor dear sister may have been left dependent on the present Duke. Her settlements were made without contemplating Lord John's accession to the title; and she may possibly have to content herself with the jointure of a younger brother's wife. No woman can better sympathise than I, in the misery of

having a rank in life to support out of a beggarly jointure ! No wonder the poor Duchess has been so anxious for a son ! As mother of the heir, she would have been executrix, guardian, trustee, or something of that sort, and taken care of herself. I fear she has little to expect from the present Duke."

" He is said to be a just and conscientious man."

" And is it your candid opinion, Lizzy, that the Duchess would profit on this occasion by having justice dealt her ?"

Not daring to reply, I eluded the question by entreating my aunt's permission to address a note of inquiry to Fitzirnham.

" Certainly not at present," she replied. " Mr. Fitzirnham will have to appear as a witness at the inquest ; and I must see Medway or Algernon, before I decide what line of conduct we are for the future to observe towards him."

Such were my incentives to sleep !—Yet, wearied out by prolonged agitation, I *did* fall into a state of unnatural torpor. I had even some difficulty in rousing myself to listen to Lady Carleton, when she arrived at my bedside the following morning, with half a dozen newspapers, forwarded by the officiousness of old Muffle, each containing a different version of the catastrophe at Rochester House.

" And thus," observed one of the Whig oracles, after a tolerably correct recapitulation of particulars, " the country is deprived of an upright and intelligent legislator, at a period when, alas ! such characters are becoming rare, and at a crisis when they are becoming invaluable. The Duke of Rochester was a nobleman of liberal views and opinions, an influential adviser of the Prince of Wales ; nay, he may perhaps be regarded as the key-stone of that splendid arch, connecting the aristocracy of the country with the community of sages, philosophers, and sects, now labouring for its advancement in the history of nations. To such a man, we cannot bid adieu without a twofold sorrow ; first, that we should have lost such a coadjutor in our efforts in the good cause ;—secondly, that a man of such high intelligence should have suffered

his mind to be overpowered by the gloom pervading at the present moment the prospects of public life. Unable to repress the disgust produced by the hideous attempt of the Tories to invade the Constitution, and involve this unhappy island in anarchy and confusion, the excellent and honourable Duke of Rochester put an end to his days!"

"We approach the death of the Duke of Rochester,"—held forth, on the other hand, the Tory print,—“with becoming feelings of sympathy in the affliction of an honourable family, suffering under a melancholy bereavement. Nevertheless, we should but ill discharge our duty, did we not congratulate the country upon the extinction of one of those dangerous torches which, on pretence of enlightening, have created incendiарism and conflagration throughout Great Britain. The Duke of Rochester was a member of that revolutionary association, the nest of baleful scorpions engendered by the genial atmosphere of Carlton House!—We do not expressly accuse the deceased nobleman of having wilfully widened the breach between the most illustrious parents in these realms, and their rebellious heir apparent; but we *do* assert that his Grace has been systematically included in the group of Falstaffs, Poinses, and Pistols, misleading and disgracing the Harry Monmouth of our times. He is gone to his account, and peace be with his manes! But, we admonish the survivors of that wanton crew, that a day of reckoning is at hand; and that though one among them, on discerning the approaching downfall of his party, was unable to bear up against the oppression of mortification and remorse, *they* have years in store, in which to recant their errors, and disavow a political creed, the infamy of which has recently demonstrated itself to even the least observant of the human kind.”

By wordy plausibility like this, how unfailingly is the world deceived! Whereas those newspapers which boldly arraigned the proceedings of the Duchess and Lord Pembury, and designated the suicide of his Grace as a social murder, were reviled as barbarians and libellers!—

CHAPTER XIX.

EARLY the following day, Algernon, who had been summoned to town, arrived in Jermyn Street.

“ My dear Lizzy !” said he, taking me aside, “ have you the least idea what has become of Fitzirnham ?”

“ Not the slightest. I have seen and heard nothing of him since you left us.”

“ How unfortunate ! The inquest is taking a most unexpected turn ; and, unless we can procure his attendance by to-morrow, the most injurious suspicions will be excited.”

“ Against *him* ?—Impossible !”

“ The jury, whose business it is to view every case with suspicion, have so severely cross-examined the servants concerning Mr. Fitzirnham’s causes of provocation,—his mode of quitting the house,—and the possibility of any person having entered the court-yard unobserved, and secreted himself in the Duke’s apartments, that on the publication of the proceedings in to-morrow’s paper, a strong implication of murder will go forth to the public.”

“ Of *murder* !—And against Fitzirnham !” cried I,—gasping for breath.

“ All would be cleared up by his appearance,” replied Algernon. “ If indeed he left town, as it is stated, immediately after his interview with the Duke, he may not yet be aware of the sad catastrophe. Could you give me the slightest indication of his movements, I would follow him till I brought him back. If within distance, I might perhaps be yet in time.”

“ I have, alas ! no information to give. Have you applied to his friends the Sheridans,—to the Pemburys—to—”

“ Well suggested !” cried Algernon. “ I felt so sure that *you* would be *au fait* to his haunts, that I gave no thought to any other person. Dick Sheridan is certain to know. I will go to him directly.”

And away he flew, in spite of Lady Carleton's efforts to detain him.

Thus forewarned by my cousin, the proceedings of the inquest, as detailed in the papers, gave no shock to my feelings. As is usual in such cases, the persons last in communication with the deceased, consisting in this instance of his upper-servants, were closely examined. The reports flying in various directions were apparently known to the jury; for one of the jurymen—a staunch Pittite, a tradesman of the neighbourhood,—was most unsilenceable in his questions to the *valet-de-chambre* as to “his Grace’s state of feeling towards the Duchess,—why he was not with her at Brighton,—and whether the Mr. Fitzirnham to whom allusion had been made was a relative of the Pembury family?”

The man was not aware that such relationship existed.

“Was he young and handsome?”

“He was.”

“A frequent visitor at Rochester House?”

“Very frequent.”

“A friend of the Duke, or of her Grace?”

“Chiefly of the Duke, whom he often accompanied home from Brookes’s.”

“You say,” persisted the pertinacious juryman, “that in the interview between the deceased nobleman and this young gentleman, the dispute ran so high, that their voices reached the hall. Did the subject of their conference transpire?”

The Coroner objected to this question, as irregular.

“When Mr. Fitzirnham quitted the house, who opened the door and let him out?”

A butler and footman presented themselves as having answered a loud ring in the library, and found the Duke and his guest in a state of excitement. The Duke’s last words, as they appeared, were—“Let me hear no more of it. Good morning.” They could not say to what those words bore reference, but received the summons as an order to escort Mr. Fitzirnham to the hall.

“You *saw* him, then, quit the house?”

“No. It was the business of the hall-porter to open the door.”

The man being summoned, stated that he *had* opened the door for Mr. Fitzirnham ; that he saw him get into a carriage waiting in the court-yard, and drive through the great gates. He was certain that he had not opened the hall door afterwards for the young gentleman. He was certain that no other person had opened it, and that it was impossible for any one to penetrate into the house through the hall, without his knowledge. He had *not* been intoxicated. He had *not* been asleep in his chair. He declared upon oath that it was impossible Mr. Fitzirnham could have re-entered the house, after dark, through the offices.

“ Was it easy to enter the house through the offices ? ”

“ He could not say. It formed no part of his duty to attend to the comings and goings of the offices. There was a wicket gate connected with this department, which, for the safety of the house, was always kept shut.”

In the over-elaborate deposition of the medical men, lay the source of all this perplexity. A young surgeon of the neighbourhood, accidentally called in as nearest at hand, who evidently considered it a good opportunity to attract public notice, stated his opinion that the pistol was as likely to have been discharged by a second person, as by the Duke’s own hand ; persisting in calling the attention of the jury to the remoteness of the spot, where, on his arrival, he had found the discharged pistol ; though it was stated by half-a-dozen servants that each of them had examined and removed the implement of destruction previously to the attendance of the surgeon.

Again, the Duke was not known to have had the pistol in question in his possession, and neither the fellow-pistol, nor powder, nor ball, could be discovered in his apartments. It was admitted that he had two private bureaux, on which seals had been affixed by order of Lord Hugh, as containing family papers of importance, and one or two of the jury expressed a desire to return to the library, and examine the bureaux. But this proposal was overruled by the rest, tradesmen of the family, who knew better than to press their investigation in a mode likely to be offensive to the present Duke. At length, however, the remonstrances of the Tory buttermen grew so clamorous that

the proceedings were adjourned till the following day, when Mr. Fitzirnham was subpoenaed to attend.

This unexpected delay was naturally the cause of great confusion in the family. No measures could be taken—no will opened—no obsequies prepared.

“I scarcely know what to do about returning to Rochester House,” said Lady Carleton, after having read and re-read the proceedings of the inquest. “The Duke gave me very little encouragement to renew my visit. But, interested as I am in this grievous affair, I feel it is there only I am likely to gain intelligence. I want to know whether anything further has been heard of the Duchess, and what has been done about the girls. The Duke was to go down to Beaufort House to-day. Their father’s death, but not his mode of death, was to be formally announced to them; and fortunately, they live in such perfect seclusion, that no vulgar rumours are likely to reach their ears.”

“Poor girls!—To *them* how irreparable such a loss!”—

“Irreparable indeed,—as they have no brother. After the decease of the present Duke, the title goes to a collateral heir. As Lady Lavinia says, in the letter I received from her this morning, (begging me to order her’s and the girls’ mourning,) what a blessing if the Duchess should prove *enceinte*!”

Unable sincerely to echo this sentiment, I remained silent.

“I confess,” resumed Lady Carleton, “I see no cause for the slightest surmise that the poor dear Duke fell by any other hand than his own; nor for inferring that, because Mr. Fitzirnham and he talked loud together, Mr. Fitzirnham is an assassin. Still it wears a very awkward appearance for your friend that he left town so precipitately, and without leaving his address. Between ourselves, as we are secure, Lizzy, from being overheard, I may venture to tell you that, thirty years ago, soon after the poor dear Duke returned from the grand tour, he formed a prodigious intimacy with this young man’s family. Fitzirnham, the father, had a beautiful place near Sevenoaks, where he used to receive the eminent public characters and wits of the day—George Selwyn, Walpole, Sir Horace Mann,

Conway,—and all that set; and a very lovely wife, who formed, perhaps, the chief attraction to the society. When Lord H—— went to Ireland, he took his brother-in-law, Fitzirnham, as his secretary, leaving the beauty, (who was not fond of sea-voyages,) alone at his country seat. Soon after this blunder, De Vere Fitzirnham was born; and I remember at the time, which was nearly that of my introduction into society, many people were scrupulous about visiting pretty Mrs. Fitzirnham, on account of her intimacy with Lord John de Vere, whom I little expected would, twenty years afterwards, become my brother-in-law. Still less, poor man,—But God's will be done!"

"Was the Duchess aware of the connexion between her husband and Mrs. Fitzirnham?"

"At the time it was going on, she must have been an infant in arms; for the lady died soon after the return of her husband from Ireland. Some one, however, may have been at the trouble of giving my sister information on the subject,—most likely Lord Pembury. For more than once, within the last three months, when I alluded to Lord Hugh's resentment of the levity of her conduct, she defended herself by reference to his brother's former *liaison* with Mrs. Fitzirnham."

"You conclude, then, that De Vere is son of the late Duke of Rochester?"

"I have given over forming conclusions, my dear, about anything or anybody. He is the son of Mr. Fitzirnham, in a legal point of view, for he was unquestionably born in wedlock; and *that* is enough for society to know or inquire."

"But it is not enough for *him*. I can imagine *his* solicitude on such a point!"

"The less we any of us busy ourselves with raking up the frailties of our ancestors or ancestresses, the better. The famous Abbé Prévost asserts that not one man in ten arrives at the age of thirty without having done something to merit the hulks. I am of opinion that, in *our* rank of life, not one man in ten is his reputed father's son. We cannot ask too few questions on such points."

You are reducing the morality of the age and country to a low standard, Madam," said I. "May the last

knowledge I acquire be that knowledge of the world, which induces mistrust and contempt of my fellow-creatures."

Still, no news of Fitzirnham! The day passed slowly and heavily away. I would have given worlds for a visit from Lord Medway, to acquire some idea of the opinions floating in the world, and the judgment formed by the present Duke of Rochester. Yet not a soul of the family came near us! In the dusk of the evening, to avoid being recognised, Lady Carleton made her way out to purchase mourning; intending to call in St. James's Square, on Lord Rawborne, previous to her return.

Scarcely had she been gone ten minutes, when I heard a sedan-chair admitted into the hall; and, rushing to the head of the stairs to warn the servants that I was not in a state to receive visitors, I saw the muffled figure of a lady, mysteriously ushered up by Phillis. And, lo! having retreated into the drawing-room, I found myself suddenly accosted by the Duchess of Rochester! Overwhelmed with emotion, she fell upon my neck. Having placed her on the sofa, I perceived by the imperfect evening light the wreck her countenance presented. Pale as death, not a tear was falling,—not a muscle in movement.—She seemed transfixed with horror.—

"I am sorry to say Lady Carleton has just left the house—" I began.

"I have been waiting for her departure," answered the unhappy woman, in a hollow tone of voice. "My business, Lizzy, is with *you*. *You* can save me—*you* can preserve me!"

I had not inhumanity to express what I truly felt, that her ruin was already consummated in the death of her excellent husband.

"Secure Fitzirnham's silence for me," she resumed. "Induce him to keep my secret in his examination at the inquest, and I am safe."

"I know not that Mr. Fitzirnham will be forthcoming. Algernon assures me that his absence would expose him to injurious suspicions. Yet I have not the means of warning him to come forward."

"Not forthcoming?—Has he not yet reached town?" eagerly inquired the Duchess.

“Three days have elapsed since we met.—A thousand horrors have intervened. He has even incurred the opprobrium of an assassin.”

“One word will suffice to exculpate *him*, and criminate *me*!” replied the Duchess. “*He* knows too well that the fatal letter—but of what am I talking!—I came hither, Lizzy, only to entreat you to procure me an interview with Fitzirnham.”

“Would, Madam, that it were in my power!”

“My fate and the fate of many hangs on his discretion. Should the inquest people persist in knowing the subject of dispute between him and that unhappy man, it would be easy to assign a political motive—”

“Be assured,” I interrupted, “that worlds would not induce him to assert anything but the truth. The quarrel between them doubtless originated in Fitzirnham’s determination to elucidate your declaration, that he was the son of the Duke of Rochester.”

“Yes, at their *morning* interview,” cried the Duchess impatiently. “It was but natural the young man should exhibit irritation on learning the infamy of his mother, and receiving the Duke’s interdiction of his marriage with yourself. But how far he can excuse to his conscience the letter he afterwards wrote, disclosing to my unfortunate husband the truth of that fatal affair at Brighthelmstone, I leave it to you and him to decide.”

“But why should you imagine he ever wrote such a letter?” cried I. “What evidence is there that the Duke ever became aware that—”

“No matter!” interrupted the Duchess. “That he did write it, is known to *me*—known to himself;—and should he admit the fact on his examination, I am lost!—The world—my family—my own children—will be entitled to brand me as not only infamous, but the murderer of my husband!”

She uttered these dreadful words with a horror-struck impassibility of demeanour, more awful than the most impassioned vehemence; and so thoroughly did her deportment impose upon my feelings, that I had not courage to appeal to her conscience, against herself.

“I know,” pursued the Duchess, finding me silent,

“that I am fallen to the lowest pitch of shame,—that I am a degraded, miserable being—reduced to supplicate where once I could command. No one can be more humiliated,—more wretched,—more debased! But I must not shrink from all this. I have still duties to perform.—I cling to life, Lizzy.—I *dare* not die! I have again to become a mother.—Should Fitzirnham’s depositions tend to inculpate me and this unborn child, I will retire to some lonely retreat, that our days may end together. But, should no accusation reach me, I may yet live to be a protectress to those unoffending girls, who have not yet heard a vilifying word applied to their unhappy mother!”

I listened, and trembled at my own responsibility.

“I cannot weep!” she resumed, after a pause.—“My eyes, my heart, are seared as with burning iron. I can but appeal to you, Lizzy Mordaunt, as the sister of your dead mother. I will not anticipate the results of Fitzirnham’s enmity. But you and he will deeply, deeply answer for it. One victim has fallen already. Does not that suffice to appease you?”

She was in no state of mind to be reasoned with. I could only reply as I had replied before, that I knew nothing of Fitzirnham’s movements, and could therefore exercise no control over his proceedings.

“And you sit there, unmoved,” cried she, “without attempting to seek him out, and force him to redeem himself from the obloquy that has fallen on him?—Tame, spiritless heart!—I, a new-made widow,—a suffering, shrinking, stigmatised woman,—have come forth from my home at all risks of exposure. The world believes me shut up at Brighthelmstone; and thither, without rest or food, I shall this night return, if so fortunate as to have obtained an interview with Fitzirnham.”

“Had I a messenger to despatch to St. James’s Square and Rochester House,” said I, “I might obtain news of Algernon, and through him of Fitzirnham, of whom he left me to go in search.”

“At neither of those places have they received tidings of either of them,” answered the Duchess. “I have a confidential agent on the watch.”

“And should Fitzirnham be still absent when the jury resumes its investigation to-morrow, what would be the result?”—

“To me or to him?”—

“To both.”

“Who, *who* can say!” faltered the Duchess. “Who can calculate upon the turn the opinion of these officious fools may take, excited as they are by the accusations of a party-press, which has no other object in view but to render a paper profitable. They may perhaps bring in a verdict of ‘Wilful Murder by persons unknown.’ A criminal trial may be the result; though, alas! it is as well known to Fitzirnham, myself, and others, that the Duke died by his own hand, as if we had been spectators of the deed.” She started up.—A sound on the stairs induced her to fear that Lady Carleton might be returning.

“She must not find me here.—Yet, by coming I have effected nothing!” cried the Duchess, pressing her hand to her forehead.

“If you were to go at once to Fitzirnham’s residence, and wait for further intelligence?”

“His lodgings are closely watched by the police,” she replied. “I should be recognised by these people, who are accustomed to see me at public places. And judge what conclusions might be drawn, were it known that the widowed Duchess of Rochester,—widowed, alas! by such means,—had paid a furtive visit to a man lying under suspicion as his murderer?—No! Lizzy, I must back to Brighthelmstone, to support once more the horrors of suspense. Will you not comfort me before I go, by the assurance that should Fitzirnham return, you will intercede with him in my favour?”

“Fitzirnham, Madam, is my future husband. His safety is my first object; his renown, my glory,” said I. “All, however, that *can* be said or done, consistently with honour, in your defence, rely upon my persuasions to effect.”

“Thanks, thanks!—And now, Lizzy Mordaunt, one word more. You must go down to-morrow to Beaufort Lodge.—You must see those girls, and comfort them more tenderly than they will be comforted by hirelings.

I dread lest old nurse Feltham, who loves them and venerates the Duke as much as she despises *me*, should let fall words in their presence calculated to enlighten them. It will be long, very long, before I gain courage to see them again.—Will you go down to them, Lizzy?"

"Alas! Madam, you well know how little I am mistress of my own movements!" said I. "And labouring, as I latterly did, under the ill opinion of the Duke, I hardly know in what light he may have represented me to his brother, or his daughters."

"Objections,—always objections against obliging me!"—exclaimed the Duchess, petulantly drawing down her veil. "But, fallen as I am, I can no longer hope for friends. Farewell, Lizzy,—farewell, my sister's daughter.—We may never meet again in this world."

"Heaven support you, my poor dear aunt," said I,—overcome by the sight of her humiliation.—"Address yourself to the Almighty for comfort and counsel; for vain is the help of man!"

She withdrew. I heard her enter the chair; and ere she could have reached the end of the street, the shrill voice of Lady Carleton was once more scolding in the hall.

CHAPTER XX.

STILL, not a word of intelligence! Neither Algernon nor Fitzirnham had been heard of. The adjourned inquest was to resume its investigation at noon the following day; and all remained in disorder at Rochester House. Lady Carleton having made up her mind to pass the morrow at Petersham for the discussion of these family afflictions, retired at an early hour to rest; and all that night I passed in bitter tears,—in agonising terrors.

At length, morning dawned, and with morning, Hope, that flies the darkness of the night. Yet unequal as I

was to support the presence of new sorrow, a letter of inquiry and condolence from my brother Henry arrived to aggravate my distress. Though he wrote ostensibly to express his sympathy in the fate of the Duke of Rochester, it was the fate of our father on which his letter chiefly enlarged.

“We have been settled this fortnight past at Aldborough,” said he; “and I can scarcely describe to you, my dear Lizzy, the effect produced on the gentlemanly-minded old man, by this compulsory cession of his habits and pleasures. His hair, which you remember gray, is now white as snow; and his fine upright figure has become suddenly bowed. My father scarcely raises his eyes from the ground. He does not eat,—he does not sleep. Much of this I attribute to the want of his usual exercise. Accustomed for so many years to pass many hours a day on horseback, he feels the loss of these bracing habits. That excellent creature, Dick Mordaunt, who has quitted his own comfortable cottage in the village of Spetchingley, for the purpose of enlivening and waiting upon the caprices of the Squire, does his best to draw him out by a nightly game at backgammon, and a morning saunter along the shore. But his favourite game seems less to excite him, now that it is no longer played in the drawing-room at Spetchingley; and, instead of enjoying the frolics of Chinks, the old terrier, the only thing he brought away, my father and Dick are constantly breaking into discussions concerning their old favourites in Leicestershire. ‘I hope the people are kind to poor Ponto!’ says Dick, with a sigh. ‘Ladybird’s puppies must be almost fit for breaking.—But, I forget.—There is no head-keeper at Spetchingley now!’—observes my father. And thus they go on, irritating each other’s regrets. I sometimes think it would be as well for the Squire if he had no one with whom he could indulge in reminiscences of Spetchingley.

“Mrs. Mordaunt’s conduct throughout these trials is truly praiseworthy. I have heard neither murmur nor reproach from her lips. She continues to perfect with unceasing attention the education of Jane and Helen; and when, in the course of the investigations that have

taken place, any instance of improvidence on the part of our poor mother becomes apparent, (as I must admit was frequently the case,) she is the first to assign good motives or sufficient excuse. In short, dear Lizzy, this woman is truly excellent; and, in spite of our first erroneous judgment, we are under serious obligations to her for the manner in which she lightens the afflictions of my father. If, however, the old man should continue to sink under them, as he has from the moment the writ was taken out against him, her task will not be of long continuance. I seldom lose sight of him for more than a few hours together. Yet every time we meet, I seem to discern a change for the worse. Any new shock would prove fatal to him. He has taken the Duke of Rochester's sad end grievously to heart, and bad me instantly write and ascertain that *you* at least were well. He called you 'Betty,' dearest sister, as in former days.—He often calls you so *now*. His memory seems to be failing."

I said not a word to Lady Carleton of this afflicting letter, when she bad me a careless good-bye, expressing a hope that before she returned from Petersham, "everything would be satisfactorily settled at the inquest."

"I am most anxious to get the funeral over," she observed, "for I want to arrange something about going out of town. I am sadly in want of country air." How cruel a moment to give me to understand that my visit was becoming an incumbrance!—

When the fatal hour of twelve was struck by St. James's, my trepidation increased to so unbearable a degree, that I resolved to profit at all hazards by Lady Carleton's absence; and, having induced Phillis by a liberal bribe to bear me company, I got into a hackney coach and bad them drive to the end of the street in which stood Rochester House; from whence I despatched my companion to inquire whether Mr. Rawborne and another gentleman had made their appearance. Aware that the inquest was sitting within, a crowd of people had collected round the gates—some crying out against the Duchess, some lamenting for the Duke; and Phillis had considerable difficulty in penetrating through the

mob so far as the porter's lodge, where, being personally known, she readily obtained an answer that nothing had been heard of Mr. Fitzirnham or Mr. Algernon Rawborne.

I thought the poor woman long in obtaining a reply to my inquiry. Yet when she rejoined me with such unsatisfactory tidings, I wished she had been longer.

"Why not order the coachman to remain here?" she suggested, after I had expressed my horror of returning to Jermyn Street without having learned the verdict. "It is surely as easy, Miss, to sit crying in the coach, as at home."

Phillis accordingly took herself off to gossip with the servants at Rochester House, while I remained in the coach; from whence I commanded a view of the gates, and the populace gathered round them.

The mob was becoming violent. Pretexts for popular excitement had been latterly wanting; and the mysterious suicide of a peer of the realm was a sufficient motive for a disturbance. Some of the people bestowed their plaudits on the late Duke, as the friend of Fox, and civil and religious liberty; some reviled him as the enemy of Pitt and the throne. Next to the assemblages I had witnessed on the hustings, I never saw so intemperate a one as that which waited the announcement of that fatal verdict!

At length, a plainly dressed man issued from the gates, who seemed well known to the people; for they pressed vehemently round him with inquiries. His reply elicited an universal groan. In a few moments, he passed the coach where I was sitting, nor could I resist the impulse to call aloud and ask what turn the proceedings were taking. The stranger, who was probably connected with the press, stopped mechanically to reply—"A strong suspicion of murder against one Fitzirnham, who has absconded.

"*Absconded!*"—What a word to hear applied to the noble, generous Fitzirnham!—The jury might possibly extend their incriminations so far as to record a verdict of "Wilful Murder!" Unversed in the legal forms of an inquest, such a verdict seemed to imply condemnation to death. My fears were roused to frenzy.—I determined to present myself for examination. I could bear

testimony to the state of the Duke's mind.—I could explain—but no! *what* could I explain?—Would not a garbled statement such as my solemn promise to the Duchess alone enabled me to afford, involve the facts in still deeper mystery?

But life and death!—Fitzirnham branded with an accusation of murder, and no one to put forth one syllable in his vindication!—Dreadful thoughts came thronging into my mind; and, almost before I understood my own intentions, I had left the coach and was hurrying towards the gates which I had so often traversed in splendour, so often in triumph.

The people crowded upon me.—The press was dreadful. At that moment I heard an increased tumult; a chaise and four, the horses covered with foam, galloped past. The gates of Rochester House instantly unclosed to admit it. The truth rushed into my mind. It contained Algernon and Fitzirnham.

I remember nothing further, till, on waking with a painful sensation, I found myself stretched on a bed in a well-known chamber, surrounded with familiar faces. I had been rescued in a state of insensibility from the trampling of the crowd, and conveyed into the porter's lodge of Rochester House; where, being personally recognised, I was removed with all respect into the house, and the attendance of Phillis and the medical men in waiting at the inquest, procured. The contusions I had received rendered bleeding necessary. I was still suffering severely. My head was all confusion,—my heart seemed turned to stone.

At length, the voice of Algernon met my ear, and I found it was my cousin's arm by which I was supported.

“Is he safe?” I murmured, clasping his hand in mine; and finding from this question that my consciousness was fully restored, he beckoned forward Fitzirnham, who had been standing concealed behind the rest.

“Is the inquest over?” I faltered, bending towards him as he knelt by the bedside.

“Many hours ago; a verdict of ‘Temporary Derangement.’ Nothing, dearest, has detained me in this house but the sense of your danger. You are recovering. I must leave it, Lizzy! This is no time for explanations.”

“One word!” I whispered. “Has anything transpired to criminate that unhappy woman?”

“Not a syllable. But dismiss these fearful things from your mind. Compose yourself, that you may be as soon as possible removed. We can meet again in Jermyn Street. Meanwhile,” he added, kissing my burning hand, and placing it in that of Algernon, “I entrust you to the care of this truest and best of friends.”

Another glance, and he was gone.

“It was impossible for him to remain here,” whispered my cousin, while Phillis withdrew to accompany Fitzirnham to the door. “The Duke must ever regard him as the unintentional murderer of his brother. For though he brought evidence that he was fifty miles on the north road in the York mail, at the period the act was committed, the letter in which the excitement of the Duke unquestionably originated, was from Fitzirnham. The contents of that letter are known only to the dead and to our friend.—With *them* let the secret rest.”

“May I not now return home?” said I. “To *me* this house is almost as much forbidden ground as to *him*.”

“The physicians insist on your sleeping here to-night.”

“Impossible!—*Impossible!*”

“It must be so, dear Lizzy. Your safety demands it.”

“But Lady Carleton will be alarmed at not finding me on her return from Petersham?”

“She has been apprised, and permits Phillis to remain here in attendance upon you. In fact, my dear cousin, were you to make the attempt, you would find it impossible to move.”

He was right. Severe contusions and bruises rendered me unable to stand. And when Algernon took leave for the night, and I found myself alone with Phillis in that vast gloomy chamber, beneath which was the fatal library containing the body of the victim and the watchers over his remains, my heart sank within me.

When midnight sounded from the harsh turret-clock of the offices, a hollow sound arose from the apartment below.

“Don’t be alarmed, Miss Mordaunt,” whispered my attendant, creeping to my bedside to conceal her own

terrors. “It is only the undertakers soldering down the coffin. The inquest prevented things being done as they ought ; and his Grace has desired that no further time may be lost. People suppose he was afraid the Duchess might appear in the morning, and insist upon seeing the corpse.”

I lay trembling with fever and terror.—Before morning, my illness had increased to delirium !

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT strange, dreary impressions do we entertain of events occurring around us during feverish excitement ; impressions analogous to the illusions of clairvoyance. I remember, as in a dream, the death-like tranquillity of Rochester House ; and, after many days, a loud trampling in the court-yard, announcing the funeral. It was scarcely day-break. The Duke was desirous that the procession, which was destined to Vere Court, in Lancashire, should pass through London while the streets were unfrequented.

Phillis, who was standing at the window of my room watching the departure of the hearse, uttered an exclamation of dismay, as the last mourning-coach quitted the court-yard. But I was too weak for questions. It was not till the close of the week, when I was well enough to have my curtains drawn aside, that the first object which presented itself to my eyes was a death’s head, surrounded with appalling emblems. My chamber happening to occupy the centre of the house, the achievement of the late Duke projected over one of the windows !

The details of a convalescence are tedious to all but the sufferer. Mine was alleviated by visits from Algernon, from Lady Carleton, and, above all, from my dear brother Henry. From the latter, I learnt that Lord Hugh de Vere had returned to Penderels ; for the Duchess, whose pregnancy had been legally signified, was shortly expected at Rochester House.

“Exhibit no anxiety to quit the house previous to her arrival,” said Harry; “if you are in a state to be moved, it shall be done. The Duchess has expressed her desire that your marriage should be solemnised under her auspices; but—”

“*My marriage?*”—

“Yes, dear Lizzy.—Every arrangement is completed. Already, I know and esteem your Fitzirnham as a brother. The good offices of our mutual friend, Rawborne, have placed us on the happiest footing: and your illness alone retards an event which I trust will secure your happiness. You will be poor, Lizzy. But you must make up in prudence what you want in fortune. Your husband promises to apply himself to the study of the law. He has great abilities, and may achieve great triumphs.”

Encouraged by such hopes, my recovery was rapid. It was not till the middle of September that the Duchess was expected in town, to administer to the will of her late husband: and one week earlier, my hand was bestowed by my brother on Fitzirnham. Our marriage, under the melancholy circumstances of the family, was strictly private. Lady Carleton and the Shanstones alone attended me to the altar; and, when I found myself once more beyond the boundaries of London, once more in sight of green trees and fields, commencing a bridal excursion with the husband of my choice, it seemed as if all the events of the last five months had been a hideous delusion.

I had still indeed some drawbacks upon my happiness; the reduced circumstances of my family, the conviction recently forced on me of Algernon’s despair at my marriage with another, and, above all, the painful constraint which still, on certain points, produced reserve between me and my husband. With *him* I never dared recur to the past. To *him* I had not addressed a single observation concerning the Duchess, or a question touching the Duke. Time would probably bring to light all that it was desirable for me to know; meanwhile, I consulted my own principles in re-enclosing, to the Duchess, a bank note of one thousand pounds forwarded to me by her banker the day preceding my marriage with Fitzirnham.

A gift from another member of my mother’s family

excited in my mind even more surprise and self-accusal, than gratitude. Lady Carleton, whom I had so often reviled as disgracefully penurious, bestowed upon me on my wedding-day a purse containing two hundred guineas; an amount enormous to *her*, whose resources were not overflowing. My uncle Rawborne had already given us a carriage. But Fitzirnham, with intuitive delicacy, declined the sum which my father had raised as my marriage portion.

From all my family, I received gratifying tokens of interest and regard. From *his*, not even a token of existence. I knew from others that the eldest son of the late Mr. Fitzirnham resided at the family-seat near Sevenoaks. There was a married daughter, too, on the Continent for the benefit of her health. But neither brother nor sister was ever mentioned to me by Fitzirnham; nor did I know whether the estrangement between them proceeded from his part or theirs. In spite of the unaffected joy he experienced in calling me his, I could discern that a cloud hung heavily on his spirits. He mourned for the Duke not only as for a father, but a father whom he had hurried to the grave.

I have dwelt long enough on gloomy subjects. A honeymoon—the honeymoon of a pair devoted heart and soul to each other—demands a lighter strain. I was not yet twenty. In spite of the sorrows that had fallen on me, I was still vain,—vain of myself, vainer of Fitzirnham; while the pride he took in *me* amounted almost to idolatry. On a hint given by the Prince of Wales at one of the Carlton House suppers, that “Miss Mordaunt ought to stand to Roubilliac for a statue of Diana Huntress,” Sherwin had insisted on making a sketch of me in that character, aquatints of which may still be found in the collection at Colnaghi’s. From this sketch, Cosway had contrived to complete a miniature, which, for months past,—months during which I believed him indifferent,—Fitzirnham had worn about his person.

“If I have thus worshipped a picture,” said he, in confiding the secret to me after our marriage, “judge what homage I shall pay to the original!”

It was, indeed, homage,—the homage of passionate

affection. We devoted a portion of Lady Carleton's gift to a tour in the lake-country. But anxious to instal ourselves in our London abode previous to my husband's initiation into the weighty business of the law, only a few days remained to be devoted to a visit to Aldborough. I felt persuaded my father would willingly avoid an exposure of his reduced circumstances to the eye of a stranger. But it was right Fitzirnham should *not* remain a stranger to him. Mine for life and eternity, he ought not to be an object of indifference to my father.

As the moment approached for meeting again, under such altered auspices, those whom I had quitted in haughty dauntlessness of spirit, fancying myself prepared to buffet with the world and triumph over its opposition, I own I trembled. A twelvemonth had not yet expired since I left home,—ignorant, arrogant, presumptuous,—discontented with the prosperity I enjoyed, and confidently aspiring to rank and opulence. I was now returning, wiser in my generation, experienced in the hollowness of human greatness, pining for my father's sake after the once-despised comforts of Spetchingley, but limited by my own choice, to a narrow income and obscure station; having refused rank and riches for Fitzirnham, yet grateful to him for having permitted me to share his poverty.—It never occurred to me to feel mortified at the idea of appearing before my stepmother and Dick Mordaunt as the wife of a briefless barrister with six hundred a-year. All I remembered was the duty of claiming my father's blessing on our marriage, and the delight of finding myself once more embraced by Jane and Helen.

But as the time approached for meeting them, and we drove up to the small house assigned to the reduced family, my heart grew sick at the idea of beholding my father exposed to such humiliations. I entreated Fitzirnham to allow me to quit the carriage and meet my family alone. But his good sense prevailed against me.

“Excitement would be injurious to both of you,” said he. “The restraint of my presence will divert Mr. Mordaunt's attention. Better he should learn, from the first, to treat me as a son.”

Our anxieties were superfluous. Dick Mordaunt was

there, fussy and tiresome as ever, to prevent all effusion of sentiment; interrupting my father's embraces and the tears of my sisters, to inquire again and again, whether the carriage were to be sent to the Swan or the King's Head, and whether he should settle with the post-boys.

I seized the first occasion afforded by my father's absence to offer a sincere apology to Mrs. Mordaunt for my former petulance.

"Say not a word on the subject, my dear Mrs. Fitzirnham," she replied, with a cordial pressure of the hand. "I regarded your little vagaries as the frowardness of a child whom I had not spirit or ability to manage. Trouble, that powerful teacher, has done what my feeble powers failed to effect; and it is indeed a matter of pride and pleasure that I am henceforward to have *three* affectionate step-daughters.—How do you find your father?"

I dared not answer her with sincerity. To *my* eye the old man presented a most afflicting spectacle. There was a degree of childishness mingling in his sorrows, that proved how severely they had influenced his mind. I had left him a hale, hearty, happy 'squire; I found him a bent, gray-headed, broken-voiced old man, desultory in his ideas, and bewildered in his memory. He seemed to take pride, indeed, in seeing me; made me sit by him, and held my hand in his, while he gave utterance to his incoherent ramblings.

"Your dear mother would have gloried in seeing you married, Betty," said he. "You have just the age and look she had, when I brought her down a bride to Spetchingley. Yes! She would have been proud to see you married; you and Alfred were always her favourites. But it would have been a trying thing to Lady Betty, poor dear woman, to have welcomed you to such a home as this. Ay, my child, and it is a sore thing to *me*,—sorer far than people know of. Lady Betty was very fond of Spetchingley,—her children were all born there;—and now she lies there in the quiet old church, where, with God's will, I shall soon rest by her side. That woman was the best of mothers,—the best of wives;—never gave me a harsh word or an angry look. There was

not a dry eye in the parish when your mother died. Mrs. Mordaunt and I often talk of it. Mrs. Mordaunt knew her excellence, and has taken a mother's place towards the girls. Jane is growing very handsome, almost as handsome as yourself. You must do your best for your sisters, Lizzy, when the poor old man is gone. He *ought* to have laid something aside for you all when the sun was shining!" And tears rolled down his cheeks as he spoke.

I implored him not to recur to topics so painful and unavailing.

"By the way, my dear," he continued, "you must apologise to your husband that I am able to afford him only so poor a welcome. Things would have been different had we been still at Spetchingley. I like the young fellow's looks,—a fine open manly countenance. Is he a sportsman, Lizzy?"

I was almost ashamed, as a Leicestershire squire's daughter, to admit that I had never inquired.

"*Not* inquired?—See what comes of living in Lon'on! Well, I shall mount him some of these days, and give you my notion of him;—that is, when we get back to Spetchingley. My son Harry (a dutiful son he is) and Dick Mordaunt and the rest, want to persuade me, that in five years or so, I shall be able to return to the old place. As if I *could* live five years away from Spetchingley; where I was born and bred, and the happiest of husbands and fathers!—Lizzy, my girl! it is only the poor old man's bones they will carry back to Spetchingley!"—



CHAPTER XXII.

THE home of our own to which we repaired on quitting Aldborough, though even smaller than the abode of my poor father, was at least bright and cheerful. The furniture was new; and, ornamented by numberless little

gifts of my friends and family, our house wore a certain aspect of elegant mediocrity, which I have since discovered to be the most dangerous of pretensions. Like most newly married couples, we were, and were to remain, all-in-all to each other. We knew the world,—despised it,—and were unanimous in our resolve to shun the giddy follies of the heartless multitude.—

Alas!

Such a determination was, in fact, indispensable to the projects of Fitzirnham. He was applying himself diligently to the law,—a study equally available should any unexpected change in the fortunes of his party, throw him into the vortex of political life. Under his directions, I, too, devoted my time to the improvement of my mind; and we passed our first prudent winter in the wisest retirement. We saw little of my own family. Lady Carleton found no loo or tredrille to attract her to our house. The Earl of Rawborne had dropped from his arm-chair into the grave; and his successor was involved in the grand annual duty of fox-hunting. The house in St. James's Square was, in fact, shut up; for Algernon, who, much to his surprise, found himself endowed by the unsuspected economy of his father with a provision of twenty thousand pounds, had accompanied my brother to Turin, where Henry now occupied a diplomatic appointment. Richard was installed in his rectory,—Alfred still in the Mediterranean;—and the Shanstones awaited at Petersham the close of the hunting-season, as a signal for their return to town for the purpose of running down the Earl. By this dispersion of the family, we were secure from those family intrusions we should have found insupportable.

One morning, however, on entering the breakfast-room, a month or two after the meeting of parliament, I was saluted by the joyous tones of a well-known voice, and the gladdening sight of our friend, Charles Fox, established at our table!—

“My dear Mrs. Fitzirnham,” cried he, cordially shaking my hand, “your very looks offer a reply to the question which my friend here has found it difficult to answer,—of why he has thought fit to desert his friends?—Not

meeting him as usual at Brookes's, we concluded he was spending a Lapland six month's honeymoon, in the country. But, my dear Fitz., we want you everywhere,—we want you more than ever.—The Prince has repeatedly asked for you."

"I fancied His Royal Highness's honeymoon as engrossing as my own?" insinuated Fitzirnham.

"No,"—replied our guest. "He is wise or kind enough to conciliate the claims of love and friendship. The Prince has taken the greatest interest in the event of the Westminster scrutiny; and, though the Windsor people have been at work, with messages and negotiations, to detach him from us, we find a warmer friend in him than ever."

"Negotiations?"—

"The carriages in weekly attendance at Carlton House on levee-days, seem to have extended as far as Whitehall; and taught the Treasury that such an opposition may become alarming. His Royal Highness is given to understand that if he will put up with a Dutch wife, and a Tory minister, his debts shall be paid, and his income increased. They have offered him two hundred thousand pounds in hand, and one hundred thousand per annum."

"How agreeable a compliment to Mr. Pitt, to be scorned with such bribes in his hand!" said I.

"And what sort of a compliment to the Princess of Orange?" added Fitzirnham.

"The Queen, (who, by the way, seems to have transferred her early affection for the Prince and the Duke of York to the ever-increasing covey of the royal nursery,) has repeatedly spoken to her son in favour of one of her nieces of Mecklenburg; perhaps, to ascertain the truth of public report touching his secret marriage. But, alas! as long as *we* remain in favour at Carlton House, Carlton House will remain in disgrace at Windsor, and in debt in town. We are forced, therefore, to drown our sorrows in much claret. Come among us again, my dear Fitz., and teach us some wiser method for the re-edification of our philosophy and finances! For your own sake, too, do not abandon a road which leads safely, though circuitously, to distinction."

"I am bent on trying a more beaten way," replied Fitzirnham, with a smile. "Promise me, my dear Fox, your custom for your first chancery suit!"

"Even as a professional man," interrupted Fox, "connection is of first-rate importance. I will not hear of this hang-dog living in corners. You have no right to rob society of either yourself or Mrs. Fitzirnham; and, if you expect the Prince to remember you when he cometh into his kingdom, prove that you have not forgotten *him* on so slight a temptation as the enjoyment of a happy fireside with the most charming wife in Great Britain!—If you have any regard for yourself, in short, show yourself as soon as possible at Carlton House."

A few days afterwards, Mrs. Sheridan, apprised by Charles Fox of my residence in town, came to echo these counsels and reproaches. She assured me it was madness to estrange my husband from his former associates; and ended by peremptorily engaging us to a dinner at her house, where, in the society of the Grevilles, Townshends, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Jekyll, and Tickell, Fitzirnham's conversational talents were drawn out in a manner only too flattering to my pride. In the evening, we had music; and Mrs. Sheridan, who, the preceding year, had induced the Duchess of Rochester to give me lessons of Arne, took the kindest pains to exhibit me to advantage, by joining me in a duet. There was a charm in the coterie of the Sheridans exactly calculated to captivate the fancy of a young person not yet at ease in society. We escaped, too, at the rational hour consistent with professional pursuits; and the same remark attested my husband's satisfaction and my own, that "occasional indulgence in such recreations would add new enjoyment to the pleasures of home."

Mrs. Greville, Mrs. Vesey, Mrs. St. John, Miss Monckton, the Hothams, Ogles, and various other luminaries of the fashionable world, with whom my husband had long been an established favourite, now hastened to honour me with their acquaintance; and the Duchesses of Devonshire and Portland, Lady Duncannon, Lady Melbourne, and Lady Jersey, distinguished me by their attentions.

“My Lizzy,” Fitzirnham used to say, when on returning home from his chambers he found the names of such visitors on my table, or their opera-boxes courting my acceptance, “you are becoming sadly the fashion!—Take care that these triumphs do not turn your little head.”—But there was no risk of my head being turned a second time by the bewilderments of fashionable life. The achievement of the Duke of Rochester still hung—a powerful ensign of warning—over the gateway of Rochester House!—

From my brother Henry’s letters, meanwhile, I learned that the Pemburys were spending the winter in Italy; and, from the newspapers, gathered frequent tidings of the movements of the Duchess. From the period of the inquest, the press seemed to have taken her Grace under its special protection. She was now “the amiable and interesting widow of the late Duke of Rochester;”—or, “the young and lovely Duchess of Rochester;” and the papers were unanimous in their admiration that “this afflicted lady, anxious that the heir of the house of Rochester should be born on the family estates, had determined to await her confinement at Vere Court, in Lancashire.”

In the month of February, these laudations were followed by an announcement which caused the blood to rise to Fitzirnham’s temples, and to retreat from my own cheeks, that “Her Grace the Duchess of Rochester had given birth to a son, (now Duke of Rochester;) who was immediately baptised by the family chaplain with the august names of his royal sponser, ‘George Augustus Frederick.’” Then followed a flourish about the ringing of church-bells, and the kindling of bonfires.

“And thus ends the reign of Lord Hugh de Vere!” ejaculated Fitzirnham, after a pause.

“Mrs. Sheridan informed me, the other night,” said I, “that Lord Hugh is on the best terms with my aunt. Mrs. Sheridan, who used formerly to meet him at Lady John’s, at Vere Lodge, assures me he is the very man to be won over by the respect shown by the Duchess to the memory of her husband, and the affection she exhibits towards the girls.”

“He may have motives for choosing to *appear* deceived,” replied Fitzirnham, with a look of incredulity.

“Mrs. Greville, too, informs me that Lord Hugh and the Duchess are left joint guardians of the children, and—”

“I trust, dear Lizzy,” interrupted Fitzirnham, “that you have not allowed these friends of yours to extract from your ingenuous soul any opinion respecting the conduct of the Duchess? Little as you and I have permitted ourselves to converse on this accursed topic, be assured that it has been most severely discussed; and, were those giddy companions of hers, who are jealous of her beauty without being her superiors in purity, able to extract from *you* any fact sufficiently strong to exclude her from society, they would glory in mixing up our names in the scandals and cabals of Rochester House.”

“Can you imagine,” I remonstrated, “that I would utter a word likely to injure the reputation of my mother’s sister?”

“In a year or two,” resumed my husband, “this woman will emerge into society more brilliant than ever, to win back her way to popularity. She *must* be received at Court,—she *will* be received elsewhere. I know of no house but my own, whose doors will remain closed against her.—But into this, even on her knees, the Duchess of Rochester shall never enter!”

“It is a concession I shall never ask.”

“She will ask it herself, my dear Lizzy. We know too much of her not to possess value in her eyes. On returning to the great world, the Duchess will see you admired and courted by those whose suffrage she appreciates, and make any sacrifice rather than suffer the world to guess the cause of our alienation.”

I seized this opportunity to mention the marriage-gift I had refused from her. But while my husband commended what he was pleased to term my rightness of mind, he added, “Give no praise to the Duchess’s generosity. *She* well knows that her machinations induced the Duke of Rochester to cancel the legacy of thirty thousand pounds he had bequeathed me.”

“A cancelled legacy of thirty thousand pounds?” cried I.—“And you never mentioned it to me before!”

“It has unwittingly escaped me, now. Ask no questions on the subject, dear Lizzy. For a thousand reasons which you may conjecture, the most distant allusion to this subject is torture to my feelings.”

Need I say how implicitly I obeyed?—

Those among my readers who are so happy as to have known Charles Fox, will admit, that, like other men of genius of a too sanguine temperament, he saw and heard with his warm heart, rather than with his sober reason. Master of the affections of the populace, he could not fancy himself wanting in the confidence of the people; and, while others of the opposition who had adopted their political principles as a step to power, beheld in the increasing strength of Pitt and the inertness of the Heir Apparent, a downfall of their hopes, *he*, who regarded power only as the means of giving action to his political principles, confidently expected a favourable turn of the wheel. He dealt with public life as with the hazards of the gambling-table; and fancied that something would “turn up” in favour of the Whigs.

With these hopes, unfortunately, he now infected Fitzirnham and myself. Accustomed to regard him as the greatest of politicians as well as the most delightful of men, I yielded implicit faith to his declarations; cordially echoing his opinion when, (after a homely dinner at our house, preferred to the costly feasts of the great for the enjoyment of my husband’s society,) he exclaimed—“Come, come, Fitz.—Lay aside your musty law-books for a single evening, and accompany me to the House.—Parliament is your destined place,—Parliament should be your school,—Parliament your study. What will the law ever yield you, compared with the distinctions and preferments of public life; and how can you excuse the waste of talents such as yours?”

“It is written, I see, that I must go down with you to the House,” replied my husband, cutting short his flatteries with a smile; and, soon afterwards, the sudden death of one of the Ponsonby family having occasioned a vacancy for a northern borough, Lord Fitzwilliam, at the solicitation of Fox and Burke, brought him into

Parliament, and effectually blighted the happiness of our little household.

From that fatal epoch, the world resumed its influence over me ! At first, I continued to beguile the long evenings of Fitzirnham's absence with books and music. But I soon began to miss the stimulus of his approving smile ; to languish after the sound of human voices. My household was too circumscribed to occupy my attention ; and a flattering billet from Lady Duncannon, or an affectionate invitation from Lady Melbourne to accompany her to some opera, ball, or concert, sufficed to draw me from my solitude.

Fitzirnham, who took pleasure in seeing me admired, triumphed in my triumphs. When he beheld the young Lady M—— glittering at the head of a magnificent establishment in all the array of wealth and fashion, and remembered that, but for my preference of himself, such would have been my position in society, he seemed to think he could not too warmly forward my participation in the pleasures within my reach.

There was, in fact, nothing at variance with our system of economy in sharing the fêtes of those to whom it would have been only irksome to accept hospitality in return ; and at the close of the season, we found ourselves engaged to pass the summer and autumn in visits to Brocket,—Crewe Hall,—Chatsworth,—and Welbeck.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE return of winter was cheered by a family event, in every rank of society the most important of a woman's life,—the advent of a first-born child. It was a girl,—a fair delicate lovely little creature,—*too* fair, *too* delicate to render permanent the moment of inexpressible delight occasioned by its arrival. My ill-fated babe scarcely survived three months ; and the most poignant pang I

ever experienced was that with which I saw it consigned to its little coffin.

Brief as was the existence of this pledge of affection, it afforded a pretext for overtures of peace from the Duchess of Rochester.

On learning from the newspapers that I was a mother, she despatched an affectionate letter of entreaty to be permitted to give her name to her grand-niece. Fitzirnham undertook to answer her. He did not explain to me in what terms he conveyed his refusal.

Unsuspicious of the frailty of our tenure of this little treasure, Fitzirnham and myself were enlightened by its birth to the inadequacy of our means to the support of a family. His parliamentary duties were now distracting his attention from the study of the law. The prospects of his party were sinking, in proportion to the estrangement of the Prince from political life; and we had no expectations beyond the twelve thousand pounds forming the inheritance of Fitzirnham, one-half of which was assured by a deed of settlement to myself.

Under these circumstances, we resolved to limit, with still closer economy, our habits of life. The brilliant society we frequented presented, even in its most gratuitous form, a source of expense; and dress, job-horses, and gifts to servants, absorbed the sum-total of an income which would scarcely have afforded pocket-money to one of our gay associates. The cost of a single night's participation in their pleasures, was ruin to such a fortune as ours.

These resolutions, however, were too sage to last. It was only so momentous an occasion as the appearance of our first-born that inspired Fitzirnham with courage to preach economy. Soon came the heavy affliction occasioned by the loss of my child; and when, after the lapse of months, my husband found me, every night on his return from the House, still bathed in tears, he began to fancy that other sorrows or discontents must mingle with my regret. To a man,—however tender his nature,—an infant is never more than an infant; while to a woman the infant that is her own, is more important than all the great or wise ones of the earth.

Fitzirnham had watched beside me over the cradle of the babe,—had supported me as I hung over the bed where its little form lay extended in death,—had followed me as I stole through the twilight to fill with flowers the coffin they were about to close without my knowledge. But he had grieved *with me*, not for the child ! It was for his wife, not his infant, that his tears were shed.

At last, when the prolonged depression of my spirits began to produce an evil influence on my health, he consulted my female friends ; who, mere women of the world,—instead of suggesting a visit to Aldborough, where the gentle wisdom of Mrs. Mordaunt and the affection of my sisters would have poured balm into my wounds,—insisted that I must be amused ; and I was accordingly given over to the golden rule of gay duchesses and giddy countesses, who fancied that a life of hurry, banquets, and music would soothe the sorrow of one who had seen her husband's smile brighten the soft countenance of a babe, his treasure and her own, only to fade into the darkness of the grave.

There was no longer a wise brother, an anxious cousin at hand, to whisper "Resist." My husband, who was gradually subjecting himself to the ascendancy of ambition as I to that of vanity, saw me excited by the society of those with whom we were hereafter to be launched in the career of public distinction, and regarded the whole as a move on the chess-board of preferment.

Though his affections were wholly devoted to me, the faculties of his mind were now otherwise engrossed. At the suggestion of Mr. Fox, he had thrown on paper the result of considerable research into the state of affairs in India ; and his pamphlet, warmly commended by Burke, was, by the advice of the party, given to the press. A second edition was called for on the day following its publication,—a third,—a fourth. India was just then the prevailing topic of the day. Warren Hastings had been recalled,—his impeachment was meditated. Every one felt or affected interest in the question ; and "*Who* has written this admirable exposé of the Indian business?" was demanded from one end of London to the other. But flattering as was the reply—"I don't know.

But now that Johnson is gone and Burke going, there is some satisfaction in hailing a writer of so much promise"—Fitzirnham was stedfast in his determination that the work should remain anonymous. He was content with the laurels bestowed on him by his friends.

Having lived for many years of my life in the society of men now immortalised by eminence in statesmanship, literature, science, art,—I have often endeavoured to decide which of these illustrations affords the strongest impetus to the mind. It had produced a feeling almost amounting to jealousy in my bosom, to see with what facility Fitzirnham burst the silken bonds of domestic life, to rush into the jarring field of politics. I now saw him estranged even from politics by the anxieties of authorship. This first and unprecedentedly brilliant success touched an unsuspected chord in his bosom. His ambition was taking a new or rather a two-fold direction. But it brought with it twofold labour, which deprived me of the society of my husband.

Often, on his return at three in the morning from the House, I have known him fling himself exhausted on the sofa; and, after an hour's repose and copious draughts of tea, apply himself to the decipherment of tedious documents, or the study of foreign works connected with the business to which his thoughts were directed. He was preparing for fresh efforts,—for new public exertions. But he was also preparing for the grave!—

It is difficult for a woman, even of the sternest order of mind, to enter into the self-denial connected with barren laurels. We sympathise in the love of power,—the love of self. But we do not forgive the absorbing love of fame which throws our very selves into the shade. I saw Fitzirnham renounce rest,—food,—recreation, to devote himself to studies productive only of the praises of reviewers or plaudits of the House. But I could not understand that *my* interruptions should become importunate; and, at length, resented as an injury the intense application consuming his nights and days. I own it with shame and grief, but it was so!—While still uncertain of his regard, I had fancied that to share with a man so highly endowed the cares and triumphs of his

public career, would be sufficient for my happiness. But already I experienced the want of more trivial companionship.—Young, trifling, vain, the burning plough-share had as yet passed but lightly over my heart. The deep, searing, scathing wounds that bring wisdom, repentance, and humility, were yet to come.

Fitzirnham occasionally looked cold and absent, when I was relating some flippant anecdote connected with the gay resorts to which, at his suggestion, I repaired, as a refuge against solitude;—the fall of some bright particular star from our glittering sphere, or the detection of some cowled hypocrisy among the prudish with whom we were at war. Impatient or angry, he never was; but I fancied I should prefer petulance to the indifference of his mild abstraction. That this depression of spirit was the result of an insidious disease, never entered into my mind.

“How glad I shall be when the session is over!” cried I, one day, when he was proceeding at an early hour to a parliamentary committee.

“Thank you!” he replied, with affectionate good faith. “I am indeed more harassed than I have strength to bear. It will be a welcome relief to get into the country. When parliament is up, I am to pass a month at Beaconsfield with Burke.”

Unluckily, I had promised to enjoy *my* first month’s relaxation at Brocket; nor had I courage to avow that my ejaculation had borne reference solely to my own inclinations.

I had many motives for wishing the session and season at an end. Without having been guilty of culpable extravagance, expenses had been forced upon my incurrence which I could not meet without having recourse to Fitzirnham. The sum given me at my marriage by Lady Carleton, had hitherto sufficed for my personal expenditure; and I often laughingly assured my husband, that I would not accept the hateful pittance called pin-money, till after my second year of married life. Three months of the stated period were yet to elapse,—and I was a bankrupt!

The impulse of my heart was to tell him so, and claim his indulgence. But I had noticed that bills were

occasionally presented which he found it impossible to pay ; and that we had greatly exceeded our income !

Under such circumstances I would sooner have asked him for the blood in his veins, than for pecuniary assistance ; and I resolved to apply to Lady Carleton for a trifling loan.—The Viscountess was in the habit of dining with us. I had constant occasions of doing her service, which my sense of obligation forbade me ever to neglect ; and I thought myself in some degree justified in seeking so small a favour from the sister of my mother.

“ Oblige you with the loan of twenty pounds for three months ?” cried she, lifting up her hands with amazement, when with fear and trembling I hazarded my request. “ Why, child, I have not fifty pounds I can call my own. My jointure of eight hundred a-year, scarcely enables me to live like a gentlewoman ; and, but for the assistance of your brother Harry, I could not have afforded to keep you in my house before your marriage.”

“ You make me blush, my dear aunt, when I remember your splendid wedding-present !” said I, shocked at these admissions.

“ Why, you surely were never childish enough to suppose I could afford that sum of money out of my own pocket ?”

“ Not out of your *own* pocket ?” cried I, now blushing in earnest.

“ The two hundred guineas came from my nephew Algernon, who knew you would be in want of pocket-money. You could not have accepted the sum, if offered by himself. Sorely against my will, therefore, (for one hates to have the undue credit of a generous action,) I consented to pass for the donor. I declare I never felt so uncomfortable in my life as when you thanked me for my liberality ; for the Shanstone girls were present, and I feared I might be expected at some future time to do as much for *them*. But, my dear, how is it that you are already in difficulties ?”

“ I am not in difficulties. But, when engaged in parties of pleasure, it is necessary to have a guinea or two in my purse, or I must be obliged to some one to pay for me, at Ranelagh or Vauxhall.”

“ A very foolish practice !” observed Lady Carleton.

“That you have not your purse with you, is a sufficient excuse for getting franked; and that you *have*, often leads to the annoyance of having to frank other people. I had no idea you dreamt of paying, when you were with such people as the Devonshires and Melbournes.”

“I should be ashamed to *be* with them on other than equal terms,” I replied, proudly.

“Ah! Lizzy,—that is just the tone you used to talk in when you first came up to me from Spetchingley; and see what it has all come to! If you had chosen to marry Sir Robert Warley or Sir Claude Lovell, instead of the younger son of nobody knows who, or rather, of everybody knows who,—you might have had some grounds for giving yourself airs.”

“I am far more inclined to give myself airs as the wife of a man so distinguished by his talents and friendships as Fitzirnham, than if married to a boor, like Warley, or a sot, like Lovell.”

“Mr. Fitzirnham’s renunciation of the Duke of Rochester’s legacy, in order to make you his wife, was no great proof of his wisdom.”

“The legacy, Madam, was cancelled by the Duke.”

“Only in the event of his marriage with Miss Mordaunt. On the day preceding his melancholy end, he had an interview with your husband—”

“Which referred to subjects wholly unconnected with myself.”

“I won’t pretend to answer for what passed. But there is good reason to suppose, that Mr. Fitzirnham, whom all the world knows to have De Vere blood in his veins, demanded his Grace’s sanction to a marriage with the Duchess’s niece. For, when the will was opened, a codicil appeared in the Duke’s handwriting, rendering the legacy of thirty thousand pounds bequeathed many years before to De Vere Fitzirnham, contingent on his renunciation of an engagement to Elizabeth, the daughter of Edward Mordaunt, Esq., of Spetchingley. Yes! my dear,—expressly contingent; and, from the colour of the ink, and other circumstances, the lawyers gave it as their opinion, that this codicil was added a few hours previous to his decease.”

“And my husband had the nobleness to keep this sacrifice carefully from my knowledge!” cried I.

“I’ve often thought you were a wretched match for him!” rejoined my delicate aunt; “particularly as you’re so bad a manager. I’ve often told you, you were going on too fast, and I’m sure I don’t know what you are to do to get out of your present scrape. Algernon is no longer here to help you; and Rawborne, except where his pleasures are concerned, is a perfect curmudgeon.—Supposing you were to write and ask the Duchess?”

“Rather beg in the streets!” was my reply. “No! I shall apply to my husband. What forgiveness would there be for me, did I show want of confidence in one who has resigned all his prospects in life for my sake!”



CHAPTER XXIV.

IT is time I should say something of the Shanstones, who certainly were not remiss in affording matter for comment; though neither Clara nor Lavinia fulfilled our expectations by figuring as Countess of Rawborne, or Rectoress of Spetchingley. An event, far indeed remote from our family, had imposed an obstacle to their matrimonial speculations:—Mrs. Bumptext was no more, and to the Dowager’s snug nest at Petersham, did the widower betake himself for consolation.

Instead of appearing there, as heretofore, one day in seven, his visits were of daily occurrence; and one fine evening in June, when the nightingales were singing, and the groves of Petersham adorned with the “greenth” and “gloomth” commemorated by the affectation of Horace Walpole, he suddenly threw himself at the feet of Lady Lavinia, and besought from her the gift of a fair hand, which, according to my aunt Carleton’s version of the story, was that of her daughter Clara, but which Sir Obadiah’s widow chose to fancy was her own.

No sooner was the marriage arranged, than Lord Rawborne and my brother Richard desisted from their courtship; *not* because it was to give them a Tartuffe for a father-in-law; but because the marriage-portions of the girls lay at Tartuffe's discretion. Lavinia and Clara were thus relieved from two interested suitors; and, as her ladyship persisted that, for example's sake, Bumptext should remain two years a widower, there was the chance of some lucky obstacle before the close of his probation. Meanwhile, I saw little of the family. They rarely came to town; and I had no horses to enable me to visit them in the country.

A circumstance, however, occurred, which threw me considerably into their society. Towards the close of the session, the labours of which had been so injurious to the health of Fitzirnham, I observed that he had frequent interviews with a "gentleman in black," whom I took to be a poor author, but who proved to be a rich man of business. On these occasions, my presence was strictly avoided. But one day, as I unconsciously entered the room where they were sitting together, I overheard my husband say to his guest—"Let it be managed in any way that does not affect *her* interests!"

To what all this might refer, I had no means of conjecture. Soon afterwards, however, I perceived that our debts were paid; and that my husband not only "put money in his purse," but into my own. That it was derived from an honourable source, I was well satisfied. Fitz. had probably realised a handsome sum by his pamphlet.

"These new riches of ours give me courage to prefer a request," said I, one day to my husband. "You are in want of country-air and country-quiet. Instead of the fatiguing tour of visits we projected, let us secure some tiny cottage for the autumn, where we may economise at our ease, and grow strong and healthy at our leisure."

Scarcely had I spoken, when my wish was accomplished. Before the end of the week, Fitzirnham told me, with one of those sunny smiles which I have never seen expand so brightly on any other human countenance, that he had hired a cottage smothered in China roses and a

neighbourly neighbourhood, at the foot of Richmond Hill. This brought me into contact with the Shanstones. But it brought a large counterbalance of enjoyment; for I was able to have my sister Jane for my inmate, and even Harry, who arrived from Italy, in the course of the autumn on a visit to my father, became occasionally our guest.

It happened that Lavinia and Clara, who, after their mother's matrimonial engagements, were no longer kept so closely under her wing, were drinking tea with me, when my brother made his unexpected appearance. Till then, he was but slightly known to them. But no sooner did Clara learn that he had parted only a few weeks before at Leghorn from Algernon Rawborne, than, breaking through all ceremony, she accosted him with a thousand questions concerning our favourite cousin. I was grateful for her interference; for a sort of uneasy consciousness restrained me in Fitzirnham's presence from minute inquiries into his health—his spirits—his pursuits; while, from the frank, open-hearted Clara, such questions seemed proper and natural.

I know not whether it arose from Harry's cordial and affectionate allusions to his friend, or the charm of his handsome person and finished manners; but I trace to that first interview, a transfer of Clara's partialities from my cousin to my brother; as well as the strong affection which soon sprang up on Henry's part towards Clara Shanstone. There was considerable analogy between their dispositions; a sort of family-likeness, the frequent basis of a tender passion.

What a happy autumn it was!—To my sister Jane, who, though approaching womanhood, had seen nothing of society, Richmond with its sociable tea-drinkings, and Willowell Cottage with its cheerful circle, presented a scene of delightful gaiety; while in her, I found a cheerful, intelligent companion, as well as a graceful ornament to our little circle.

One morning, soon after Harry had brought her to Willowell, we were favoured with a visit from our serious neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Quiesbury, just as Fitzpatrick and Fox had driven over to us from Strawberry Hill.

“We had the pleasure of calling yesterday at Peter-

sham," observed Mrs. Quiesbury, who was seated near my sister, "and found them together. What a charming couple they will make!"

"Provided Lady Lavinia can be induced to give her consent," replied Jane, supposing her to allude to my brother and Clara, whose mutual attachment was now becoming the subject of general remark.

"My dear ma'am,—she has already consented!"

"You are mistaken," said my sister—"he has not even proposed. He is so afraid of seeming actuated by interested motives."

"He is rich," interrupted the sententious Mrs. Quiesbury, "in that which passeth show.—*His* treasure is one where moths do not break through and steal!"

Jane found it too difficult to preserve her gravity at the misquotation, to reply.

"And such a thing, ma'am, for his poor children, to secure such a stepmother," added Mrs. Q.—"one who has proved so exemplary a mother to her own!"

My sister was now completely bewildered. But it soon appeared that the Quiesburys were referring to Lady Lavinia and her Gamaliel, instead of to Clara and my brother. And to this trifling misunderstanding, was Henry indebted for the most fortunate event of his life!—At their next visit to Petersham the Quiesburys could find nothing better to relate for the edification of Lady Lavinia, than the curious blunder of "little Miss Mordaunt that was," relative to her brother and Miss Clara.

The old lady was both startled and delighted. Deeply hurt by the desertion of her two nephews, she caught at the idea of being sued by the elder son, for the hand of the daughter tacitly rejected by the younger. Lady Carleton persisted that she was anxious to remove Clara out of sight of her venerable bridegroom. But, to do him justice, no man could conduct himself more honourably than Dr. Bumptext, in the negotiations that ensued. He it was whom Lady Lavinia deputed to tender her daughter's hand, with a dowry of one hundred thousand pounds, to my astonished brother; and, in the course of a week, Clara and Henry found themselves betrothed, as if by enchantment.

My poor father's consent, as may be supposed, was readily obtained. He conditioned only that, dependent as Henry must be upon his wife, he should not on his marriage relinquish his diplomatic avocations; and sorely against her will, Lady Lavinia saw her daughter depart for a land of Papists. Meanwhile my cousin Algernon's former praises of Clara's amiable nature, were confirmed by the kindness of her proposals to my brother, that Jane, who like most girls educated in seclusion was smitten by the love of travel, should accompany them to Italy.

The loss of these three favourite companions created a miserable void in my existence. After Clara's marriage, I found the vicinity of Petersham an annoyance. Lady Lavinia was one of the many who can be partly, but not wholly generous. She could part with five thousand a-year, in favour of her daughter and nephew; but not without calling upon me twice or thrice a week, to remind me of her sacrifice.

When Parliament met, my husband was obliged to take up his residence in chambers more than half the week, and to pass more time on the road than we were inclined to spare; and like most other women, I, who had found it impossible to remain in London after the month of June, found it nearly as difficult to remain in the country after the month of January.

“These caprices of your little ladyship will be the ruin of me!” said Fitzirnham, kissing me on the forehead, the day he rode down to announce that he had hired a small ready-furnished house in Chesterfield Street. “Do not take a fancy for Carlton House, for *that*, you know, I *cannot* give you. Our residence at Willowell has cost us exactly three times what we set down for it; and I claim your assistance, dearest, to prevent a recurrence of this at our new residence. It would be wrong to conceal from you, Lizzy, that our want of management has already encroached largely on our little capital.”

“Then I am indeed unpardonable!” cried I. “It was doubly my duty to supply my want of fortune by excess of prudence; yet—”

“Do not accuse yourself, my sweet love,” interrupted

Fitzirnham, “or be discouraged by my remark. Our prospects are brightening. I supped with Fox and Hare last night; who told me that Sheridan has large bets at Brookes’s that we shall be *in* before the close of the session.”

“He is so easily elated!”

“But not less easily depressed. By the way, my dear girl, I have a little word of advice for you previous to our reinstallation in the world. Though the disorder of the Prince’s affairs, and his intention of bringing them before Parliament, have put a stop to the entertainments at Carlton House, there are abundance of other places where you must inevitably meet the Duchess of Rochester.”

“Is she living in London?”

“In greater force and beauty than ever. Her widowhood expired,—her weeds laid aside,—at the head of one of the finest fortunes in the kingdom,—she attracts universal attention.”

“Even Lady Carleton, whose ill-nature is never more venomous than when alluding to her sister, declares that nothing can have been more unexceptionable than the conduct of the Duchess since that unhappy event,” said I, in a deprecating tone.

“Nothing more *judicious*. She has afforded time for the whole affair to be forgotten by all but myself; and the request I have to make you, Lizzy, is that—”

“Do not make it!” cried I, stopping his exhortations by a kiss. “I can fully enter into your feelings. Trust to me to avoid all renewal of intercourse with Rochester House.”

CHAPTER XXV.

THOUGH the splendours of Carlton House were in eclipse, the Prince’s establishment curtailed, his equipage sold, his entertainments suspended, I scarcely remember to have seen him so ingratiating in manner and address

as under these mortifying circumstances. His Royal Highness probably judged it expedient to replace those absent aids to popularity, by increased urbanity.

He had other little embarrassments, too, to overcome. Enlisted from so early an age, in the ranks of gallantry, it was not possible that he should have attained his six-and-twentieth year without creating rivalships and jealousies, such as serve to convert into furies fine gentlemen and finer ladies. He had been faithless too often, and was now become too exclusively faithful, not to find lovely brows knit against him, over which had formerly waved his armorial plume ; and there was consequently depreciation as well as affability in his mode of smiling his way through the crowds of the fashionable world.

Between the Prince and Windsor, there was total estrangement. When the chances of private or public life brought them together, the filial obeisance of his Royal Highness remained unnoticed by the King ; and this unnatural state of alienation was promoted by those whose duty towards both was that of conciliation. When the Prince's application for an increase of income was peremptorily rejected by his Majesty, instead of attempting to shake by argument the obstinate opposition infused into the mind of the King by the policy of Pitt, the Prince saw fit to expose his embarrassed finances to the commiseration of the people. Carlton House was ostentatiously shut up ;—not cleansed alone of hungry parasites and foreign libertines, but closed against the decent claims of hospitality. His stud was paraded to the hammer in solemn ovation through St. James's Street. His costly buildings and improvements were not only suspended, but consigned by studied neglect to premature decay. His train of domestics was dismissed ; his equipages were sold. His Royal Highness was henceforth to be only the most public of private gentlemen.

In vain did the Duc de Chartres, who, having succeeded to the title and prodigious wealth of his father, had already visited England as Duke of Orleans, renew his offer to take upon himself the discharge of all claims upon the Heir Apparent. His Royal Highness's sense of dignity as a prince of the blood, rejected the humiliation ;

and it was settled that, before the close of the session, Parliament should become umpire between the prudence of the sovereign and prodigality of his son.

It was not, however, by matters of such trivial interest that the mind of Fitzirnham was engrossed. The Commercial Treaty between England and France had occupied his attention throughout the winter; and the impeachment of Warren Hastings was about to be followed by the trial which, far more than his offences, has served to immortalise his name. In conjunction with Burke and Sheridan, my husband was giving his nights and days to the consideration of the sufferings of an oppressed people, which the strong-right-arm of our own comparatively insignificant tribe, had laid in chains. His own interests were forgotten,—his own affairs neglected,—his own health disregarded,—to minister to the justice of a cause involving the interests of millions. Our creditors preferred *their* claims while he was thus engrossed; and were dismissed by the readiest and most ruinous mode of payment—the absorption of our little capital,—in order to free his powers of mind from the harassing influence of importunity. It was not worth while to hazard a day's tranquillity, at such a crisis, for the sake of a hundred pounds. But, how could the demands of creditors be otherwise than importunate, when even the society of the wife he loved had become troublesome!—

“Go, and amuse yourself, dear Lizzy,” he would say, as he locked himself into his study with his reading lamps and MSS.;—“since these peremptory occupations render it impossible for me to devote myself to your society!”

I *ought* not to have obeyed!—I ought to have known that, when a husband is compelled to *earn*, a wife should learn to *spare*; and, while Fitzirnham lavished his powers on the acquirement of a name for the eventual acquirement of fortune, I, like a thrifty housewife, should have sat at home; ready to soothe such moments of harassed leisure as he could snatch from his laborious avocations.

Instead of this, I rushed abroad into the world, to be flattered by princes, and courted by duchesses; dazzled by brilliant sights, bewildered by the giddy chimes and

changes of fashion,—neglectful of all the higher duties of life.

The auspicious marriage of my elder brother having given a more cheerful colouring to the prospects of the Mordaunt family, my father consented that my sister Helen should pass a season with me in town. I had thus a motive for accepting the flattering overtures of my friends; and while Harry, that best of brothers, liberally provided the means of introducing her with advantage, my wiser step-mother entreated me only not to expose my pretty thoughtless sister to the intoxications of a scene so much at variance with her humble prospects. But, forgetful of my own former vicissitudes, I whispered to myself with a smile,—“My sister shall return to Aldborough no more. She shall form a brilliant marriage!”

It happened that the three leading beauties of our society, the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Duncannon, and Lady Melbourne, had each, just then, the prospect of becoming mothers; so that the dissipations of the preceding year were suppressed. We had fewer balls, but more play; and the increase of the idlers of public places fell to the share of such minor divinities as myself and my sister. It was scarcely possible, however, to find a face more regularly beautiful than that of Helen.

Among the young people of the present day, I find few so fair as those who graced the circles of my own. There was a swan-like dignity in the time of hoops and minuets, a mode of carrying the head and rounding the arm, very different from the headlong deportment, and slouching gait of to-day. The ladies of the land certainly walked and talked better, during the reign of Blue-stockings and Sir Joshua!

One night, soon after Helen Mordaunt’s arrival in town, we attended one of Colonel Dottin’s masquerades; and, though closely masked, our tall figures, arrayed in Swiss costume, attracted so much notice, that I was not sorry to have secured the attendance of Sir Marcus Hamilton and Lord Ailesfort, who were paying marked attention to my sister. In particular, we were followed by a Neapolitan fisherman, whose remarks far outstepped the bounds that render compliment complimentary.

“Very fine creatures for milk-maids!” cried our tormentor. “To see them toss their heads, one would fancy they had never been within hail of an honest fisherman before. Yet, after all, I doubt if they’re anything better than the daughters of a country ‘squire.”

“My good friend,” said Lord Ailesfort, “let me recommend you to leave these ladies to the society of those who are privileged to protect them.”

“Privileged? *Santissimo Gennaro!*!” exclaimed the rude sailor. “Not half so privileged as myself!” and, as he was actually on the point of placing his arm round my waist, Sir Marcus thrust him aside, and would have torn off his mask, when our mutual exclamation of “Dearest Lizzy, don’t you know me?”—and—“Alfred, my brother Alfred!”—put a speedy end to the dispute.

It was indeed Alfred who, arrived in London from the Mediterranean, had followed us by Fitzirnham’s advice from Chesterfield Street to the masquerade. And well might his sisters be excused for not recognising the Eton boy in the fine, tall, manly officer who now presented himself; and who, as a gallant lieutenant, had not, it appeared, outgrown the pranks of boyhood.

“What events in the family since I quitted you, dear Liz.!” he exclaimed, as soon as Sir Marcus profited by his appearance to share with his rival the task of entertaining my sister. “First, alas! poor Spetchingley paid off, and my father left at sea. Then your marriage,—my uncle Rawborne’s death, which puts a hundred a-year into my pocket; and Harry’s match, which they say has put five thousand into his! By the way, I saw Algernon t’other day at Venice, where he lives like a prince and a misanthrope;—a wreck,—a complete wreck,—and all your doing, Miss Lizzy!—He tried to talk of *you*,—but it would not do.—Tears came into his eyes every time your name was mentioned.—Not so Harry and his wife, with whom I spent a week at Turin, and who could talk of nothing else.”

“And Jane?”

“Jane was taken up with the sighs of young Rothesbury, one of the *attachés*. By the way, I came home from Turin with the Pemburys. We arrived at Dover

this morning, and they will be in town to-morrow.—A fine fellow Pembury ; and *she* a charming woman.”

“ I do not know *her*, and do not like *him*.”

“ So he told me. He said there was a cloud between him and my lovely sister, Mrs. Fitzirnham, which he trusted to my intervention to clear up.”

“ No, my dear Alfred. Lord Pembury is one of those with whom I will never renew my acquaintance.”

“ Nonsense, nonsense ! Pembury is a plain-sailing fellow. I *must* have you like Pembury. I shall bring him to call upon you as soon as he comes to town.”

Alfred was one of those on whom argument is thrown away. I determined, therefore, to trust to my future ingenuity to avoid Lord Pembury’s acquaintance. Meanwhile, it puzzled me greatly to conjecture on what ground he was to stand with the Duchess. Though my aunt had not yet appeared in public since her arrival in London, I heard of her from those who had dined at her magnificent residence in Spring Gardens, as looking younger and handsomer than ever ; having laid aside her former flippant gaiety for a quiet dignity, infinitely more becoming. The young Duke appeared to be the engrossing object of her life. But her daughters resided with her ; and Lady Isabella, now sixteen years old, was said to be a model of grace and beauty.

We had not yet met ; and I dreaded the chance of an accidental encounter in society. For my own part, I could have wished that peace should be between us.—Rochester House having been sold and rased to the ground, streets and squares were already erecting on the site : and thus I could have wished it to be with our resentments.—Lady Lavinia was residing at an estate near Kelso, which she had purchased and settled on her new husband and his children. Lady Carleton, sinking into the regular Rawborne superannuation, was kept alive only by snuff and tredrille. Lord Rawborne was exclusively a man of business,—for the turf and the whist-table were to him no matter of sport ;—so that my own family afforded me not a single available companion. Yet Fitzirnham remained inflexible ; persisting that the Duchess of Rochester was no companion for his wife.

But my brother Alfred was one of those to whom all conventional deferences of ceremony appear superfluous. Arrived in his native country after a three years' absence, he felt privileged to bring a friend to a sister's house with a claim that he should be well received; and no sooner had Fitzirnham quitted home the following day, than in walked my brother,—accompanied by Lord Pembury!

“I have brought my friend Lord Pembury, who fancies he was out of favour with you when he quitted England, Bess,” said he. “So give him a hearty welcome for my sake, and to prove you are not the vindictive puss he fancies.”

By this strange introduction, Lord Pembury seemed not a whit embarrassed. I found him strikingly altered; grown older, milder, more silent, more absent; and like other quiet people, apparently relieved by the noisy rattle of Alfred. No sooner, however, was my brother engrossed in conversation with Helen, at the other side of the room, than, approaching me, he whispered an apology for having taken my house by storm,—pleading his desire to be beforehand with my interdiction of his visits.

“It is now three years since I became anxious to offer humble excuses to you,” said he. “My eagerness has been increased by many a conversation on the subject with my friend Rawborne, in whose society I have been living at Venice. Be in charity then with me, my dear Mrs. Fitzirnham. Suffer me to account myself among your friends; and I shall feel that my long absence has not been in vain.”

“The number of my friends is regulated by my husband,” I replied; “and that Mr. Fitzirnham is not altogether guided by my inclination in such matters, is evident in the fact that he does not permit me to see the Duchess of Rochester.”

“Mr. Fitzirnham is to blame,” replied Lord P. in the same calm tone. “Kindred blood is the cement by which tribes are founded, and from tribes, nations. Unless families hang together, where can we hope for union in the world?”

“Were my support in any degree important to the

Duchess," I observed, "he might, perhaps, have been more placable."

"The support of a virtuous woman must always be important; the friendship of a beloved niece, gratifying. For my own part, the longer I live, the more I learn to revere those Christian axioms—'Bear and forbear—Live and let live.' In this, I am not pleading the cause of the Duchess, but my own. The Duchess I have not seen, and am not likely to see. I am only speaking for myself—"

"And *of* yourself, like an egotist as you are!" cried Alfred, who had exhausted his inquiries of my sister. "I can't guess how people find so much to say about their own feelings and opinions. I swear I've heard you and Algernon go prosing on, hour after hour, gliding along in the moonshine, in one of those Venetian coffins, till you made me as sleepy as the water dozing below! After a man has owned himself hungry, thirsty, tired, glad, sorry, angry, or ashamed, what the deuce more *has* he to feel?—Those subtleties of yours and Algernon's, about elective affinities, and such sort of rhodomontade, appear to *me* mere devices of Satan."

This speech, which provoked no reply from Lord Pembury, made me conscious of a feeling which Alfred had not included in his list of sensations. I felt *curious* to learn the nature of those disquisitions between my hermit-cousin and his guest; nor was I sorry when, on applying that evening to Fitz. for permission to call on Lady Pembury, he replied—"Visit Lady Pembury?—Why not?—You will find her one of the most charming women of your acquaintance."

I had been long convinced that the Duchess of Rochester's inexpiable offence in his eyes consisted in her treachery towards myself and wanton attack on the memory of his mother; a suspicion confirmed by his want of rancour towards Lord Pembury. With the renewal of my acquaintance in this quarter, however, came the renewal of other reminiscences. A week or two after the arrival of Lady Pembury, she was the first person to point out to me an alteration in the appearance of my husband.

"The last four years have effected strange changes in us all," she observed. "But in Mr. Fitzirnham, the change is more than strange,—it is alarming!"

"The mere consequence of late hours and close application."

"And what more is wanting," observed Lady Pembury, "to undermine any human constitution?"

"You have been looking on the sunburnt faces of Italy," said I, "till we pale, chilly mortals of the north appear mere spectres."

"The remark is more just than you suppose," she replied. "Nothing strikes me more on my return to England than the 'pale cast of thought' impressed on the countenance of our men of eminence. In the south the

"Souls made of fire, and children of the sun,"

are rarely of a reflective turn. Full of gesticulation and emphasis, they expend the energy of their minds in demonstration; while the English, concentrating all within the depths of their hearts and minds, exhaust nature by excess of feeling and reflection."

"You think, then, that Fitzirnham has a care-worn look?" said I. "Remember, he is now a family-man!"

"I cannot jest upon the subject," said Lady Pembury, shuddering. "I confess to you that the sight of Mr. Fitzirnham has greatly shocked me."

This candid admission ought to have secured my confidence. But I felt displeased that any other woman should affect so strong an interest in my husband.

"Pardon me, if I have offended you," said Lady Pembury, discerning my coldness. "But as the ward of the late Mr. Fitzirnham, I feel a strong interest in his son."

I now felt still more indignant. My husband had often alluded to Lady Pembury as an acquaintance;—a woman betrayed into fashionable dissipation by an ill-assorted marriage; but he had never spoken of her as the ward of his father. Too proud to avow my surprise, I resolved to discourage all advances to intimacy on the part of the lady, and to refrain in Fitzirnham's presence from allusion to her name. This, indeed, was easy; for I saw little of him. Involved in labours similar to his

own, Charles Fox sought relief from political cares in the excitement of play; Sheridan, in the hazards of theatrical speculation; while Burke, more wisely, renovated his faculties in domestic seclusion. *My* husband retired from the toils of the senate to the toils of the study. His leisure was pledged to the booksellers. When fainting with exhaustion of mind and body, he had resort to restoratives only that he might complete his engagements.

Yet all this passed unobserved before my eyes!— Alfred rallied me on being married to a bookworm.— Helen regarded him as an ambitious man, resigning present enjoyment for the prospect of public distinction. Even his political associates challenged him with being too laborious,—too covetous of fame.

The over-tasked man was labouring for the daily bread of his wife; and his friends and family knew it not!—

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE time was now arrived for a declaration of hostilities between the King and Prince of Wales; and the impatient creditors of the latter were only pacified by the promise of the city of London to apply to parliament in his behalf. Mr. Pitt having proclaimed, in his place as minister, that no intention existed on the part of the King to release the Heir-Apparent from his difficulties, Alderman Newnham gave notice of a motion intended to render the hoped-for grant a matter of political warfare. Votes against the measure were mustered by Government from all quarters; and threats held forth by Pitt to expose to the public a correspondence involving distressing details of the nature of his Royal Highness's embarrassments. Mr. Rolle, (the unhappy “De'nshire Squire” “damned to everlasting fame” as the hero of the Rolliad,) went so far as to allude to the private marriage of the Prince of Wales; and, from that period, perpetual meetings took place, at Carlton

House, between His Royal Highness and his private and political friends,—Grey, Fox, Sheridan, Fitzirnham, Alderman Newnham and Sir William Lemon, the two Members who had undertaken to bring forward the question.

But in this, as in other instances, the Prince reposed only partial confidence in his friends; and when, in the course of a debate preparatory to the motion of Alderman Newnham, Charles Fox was heard to disclaim in the name of his royal friend any marriage between the Prince and Mrs. Fitzherbert, the surprise of society was only equalled by the indignation of the lady.—That Charlie was the dupe of equivocation on the part of his royal friend, no one doubted; and the Duchesses of Portland and Devonshire,—nay, even the Duchess of Cumberland,—hastened to demonstrate, by their attentions to the lady, their conviction that the disavowal originated in anxiety to emancipate the Prince, even at the expense of honour, from his harassing embarrassments.

A compromise at length took place between Government and the Heir-Apparent. In an interview between his Royal Highness and Mr. Pitt, it was agreed that arrangements should be made for his relief, and the Alderman's motion withdrawn.—But *who* was to expiate the pitiful offence offered to a defenceless woman?—The Prince undertook to restore the fair fame of Mrs. Fitzherbert to at least the ambiguity of reputation she had hitherto enjoyed. But who was now to be the dupe or deceiver, among those through whose intervention the House of Commons was to be silenced?

Charles Fox, justly indignant, refused all further interference. Mr. Grey, a young man entertaining the most chivalrous sense of honour, rejected an application to the same purport. Sheridan was the only member of the party to whom the wishes of the Prince, on this as on all other points, were law and gospel.

It was at this time I first noticed an increase of lassitude and despondency on the part of my husband. Scarcely was the delicate question of the grant of an addition to the Prince's income and the payment of his debts decided, and the establishment at Carlton House

replaced on its former footing, when I perceived a coolness between Fitzirnham and his Royal Highness. Less alarmed by a circumstance which threatened extinction to our hopes of preferment, than mortified by a withdrawal of those courtesies so flattering to my vanity, I questioned my husband on the subject.

“Do not be angry with me, for having deprived you and Helen of a few fêtes,” he replied, with a melancholy smile. “I am in disgrace,—and you may suppose that cogent were the reasons which determined me to incur such a risk,—when I admit that my last remaining hopes emanated from the friendship of the Prince. Fox and Grey have patrimonial fortunes. Burke possesses, apart from private property or official emolument, an income as the agent of America. I have nothing to look to but the patronage of the Prince! Yet I renounced it, Lizzy, and for ever,—if to be purchased by so vile a concession as a lie,—a lie dishonouring the reputation of a virtuous woman, the companion of my wife.”

“You did right,” said I,—proud that he had escaped a snare fatal to Fox, and despised inducements irresistible to Sheridan. “I thank you for my friend—I thank you for myself;—and henceforward, accept with pleasure the disdains of Carlton House. But tell me,—are our means indeed dependent on courtly favour?—May we not still, by retirement,—by economy”——

“Too late—too late!”—ejaculated Fitzirnham, pressing his hand upon his forehead. “Economy might have prevented the evil,—but will not repair it. The Prince had long held out hopes to me of a place in his household. On this inducement, and the sanguine expectation of our party coming into power, nearly all that was tangible of our fortune has been dissipated. From Carlton House, I have now nothing to expect. Even the most sanguine of the Whigs begin to despair.—We must trust, Lizzy, to our own resources.”

“But, you say, they are exhausted?”

“The six thousand pounds settled on yourself are still secure.”

“Three hundred a-year!” said I, aghast, but more alarmed for him than for myself. “Why—why did I

add my persuasions to those which induced you to relinquish your profession!—*There* at least—”

“Regrets are now unavailing,” expostulated Fitzirnham. “Exertion is all that remains for me.—I have profited largely by my aptitude for literary occupation; and so long as I have health and strength, employment of this kind cannot fail.”

His voice faltered as he spoke; and, fixing my eyes on his face, I seemed to discover for the first time, the ravages effected there by the ruthless hand of care! That it should have needed such an incentive to reveal to me the decaying strength, the breaking constitution of him I held so dear!—

“Fitzirnham!” I whispered,—my heart sinking within me,—“you are suffering,—you are ill,—you—”

I could not conclude. As I clung weeping to his bosom, I felt that his tears were falling on my head.

“You are worn with work,” said I, recovering at length the power of utterance. “Oh! be well, dearest,—be strong. Renounce all thought of business,—all thought of gain. Recover,—only recover.—There will be ample time for the re-establishment of our affairs.—Let us instantly leave town,—let us seek a pure air,—let us—”

“Compose yourself, my sweet wife,” interrupted Fitzirnham. “It was the dread of this impetuosity which kept me silent. I *am* well, Lizzy.—I am in no sort of danger:—a little over-tasked, perhaps, during this arduous session; but soon to recover.”

“No, no!” cried I.—“Lady Pembury was right. Lady Pembury was quicker-sighted than I have been. These exertions are killing you, and it is my fatal folly in which they have originated. But fear no further weakness on my part. From this day, I renounce society,—and devote myself to those domestic pleasures which may attract you with dearer influence to your home.”

With a mournful smile, Fitzirnham shook his head.

“You have a right to imply doubts of my stability of character,” I faltered. “I have not deserved your confidence.”

“You *have* deserved it,—and you have it,—pettish child!” said Fitzirnham, imprinting a gentle kiss on the

brow that lay half-hidden in his bosom. “I merely wished to express, dear Lizzy, that the real interests of your husband would not be consulted by any sudden change of system likely to provoke inquiry into its motives! I have hampered myself, dearest, with public responsibilities. I belong to my constituents,—to Lord Fitzwilliam.—I cannot quit London.”

“Other members obtain leave of absence on the score of health?”

“Others, with influence and interest. Your husband is but a humble drudge, whose pretensions to his seat consist in assiduity and usefulness. And since it is thus, do not draw on me the distrust of my creditors, and the officiousness of my friends, by proclaiming your uneasiness. Live as you *have* lived, among the gay and great. Smile with those who smile,—look lovely among the loveliest. Let me have still *one* thing to be proud of. Lizzy! did you but know what bitter hours the mere sound of your voice has had power to soften!”

“At least,” said I, perceiving that Fitzirnham was preparing to leave the room, “I cannot suffer my family to be a further incumbrance to you. Alfred sails next week for the Baltic; but Helen—”

“Helen must not leave us a day earlier than was proposed,” said my husband, firmly. “Her interests in life might be seriously injured by quitting town; nor must Mr. Mordaunt be rendered uneasy by her premature return to Aldborough. All I ask of my dear wife is composure. Prudence, it is no longer necessary to inculcate.”

Composure!—Agitated as I had been by this interview, how infinitely did my perturbation increase when no longer supported by Fitzirnham’s exhortations! Ruined,—his health desperately impaired,—yet compelled to efforts of mind far more painful than the heaviest manual labour. My husband—my noble, high-minded Fitzirnham,—he whom I would have surrounded, at the cost of my heart’s blood, with all the joys and luxuries of life!—*Ruined*—perhaps *dying*—and ruined and dying for my sake!

And I was forbidden to weep—forbidden to disclose my consternation—forbidden almost to repair my errors!—I

was to go smiling and fooling it on, amidst the glittering pomps of society, while dews of exhaustion rose on his sallow forehead in the stillness of his midnight toil!—What bitterness was in my heart, as all this presented itself for the first time to my imagination!—I wrung my hands—I cried aloud—I cursed myself as the origin of his misfortunes!—

Nor was there a friend from whom I could seek counsel. To admit my distress was, in fact, to become a beggar. Henry's obligations to his wife were such as precluded application to *him*. Richard had closed his heart and purse even against his own father. My only friend was Algernon; Algernon, to whom, in this instance, I should have felt it treachery towards Fitzirnham to apply.

And there was the world,—the mob of gaudy, noisy, fluttering things; driving, without motive, from place to place; surrounding themselves with music to which they do not listen, flowers which they do not see, delicacies for which they have no appetite, literature for which they have no comprehension;—the world,—to which I might confide my tears—my terrors—my despair!—Oh! with what anguish did I, that night, in obedience to the commands of my husband, parade my pale cheeks and aching heart through the thronged assembly at H—— House. I saw around me all the prodigality of wealth,—all the levity arising from its possession. I felt as the beggar-woman may feel, who, sitting on the door-step of the great with a starving child upon her knee, hears within the exulting clamour of prosperity,—the fulness of plenty;—and in her own hollow bosom the whisper of the fiend calling upon her to “*curse God and die!*”

There was one person, one member of even that brilliant assemblage, to whom I felt half inclined to turn for solace. But how, after all my ungraciousness, to re-accost her?—How admit my fears for Fitzirnham to Lady Pembury, without at the same time admitting the cause and necessity of his exertions?—From her, I might have obtained the information I desired and dreaded, whether the illness which detained Fitzirnham's sister in the south of France, was of pulmonary tendency.

I dared not!—I continued to return with an unmeaning

smile the mechanical curtsey of one in whom, at such a time, I might have found a valuable and consoling friend. Even Alfred, who might have served as intermediator between us, was gone to renew the hazards of his precarious profession ; and I looked at my pretty Helen as she sat opposite me at work, with the first delicate bloom of girlhood hovering on her cheek and the sweet confiding smile of perfect happiness beaming in her looks, and had not courage to wither up her youth, by participation in a grief to which she could yield no alleviation.

Whenever it was in my power, however, I assigned to others the task of escorting my sister into society. Many of my friends whose daughters were not yet presented, took delight in the chaperonage of a girl so fair and pleasing as Helen Mordaunt. Society, which soon discerned that she was indebted for her conquests to no paltry arts or unfair manœuvres, forgave her success ; and, before the close of the season, I received a visit in form from the old Countess of Ailesfort, to inquire whether any objection existed to the marriage of her only son with my sister.

None was assigned on the part of Helen, none on that of her family, except a fear that the respectability of her connections might not be held a counter-balance to her want of fortune. But the Dowager, eager for the early settlement in life of her only son, gladly accepted the compromise : and, while my own heart was breaking with grief, I had to receive the congratulations of all London on the auspicious alliance in my family.

In such a case, there was no need to apply to the generosity of my brother. Henry insisted on enabling us to meet the event with becoming splendour. Our little household sparkled for the last time in honour of the nuptials of "the Countess of Ailesfort !" and, when the carriage-and-four drove from our door conveying the bride to the castle of her lord, Fitzirnham, gazing upon me with wistful eyes, whispered mournfully, "Such, but for me, would have been *your* destiny. And now, nothing remains for my Lizzy, but debts and despair!"

The session closed at last. The season was over. The leaves began to assume their autumnal tint; but *this* year, there was no hope of a cottage in the country. Our

difficulties rendered removal impossible. The Devonshire family departed for the Continent. Charles Fox had already quitted England. Our usual country society was entirely broken up; and Crewe Hall and Ailesfort Castle, to which we were warmly invited, were too remote from London to admit of the expense of such a journey.

“I must remain here *and work*,” said Fitzirnham, glancing round our now desolate habitation. “I might pay a country visit or two, alone; but the benefit of change of air would not repay me for the loss of the society essential to my happiness!”

Could any earthly consideration propitiate the ruthlessness of destiny, it might surely be the spectacle of two young people united in heart and soul, and struggling hand in hand against misfortune! We had everything but one. We enjoyed youth—station—honour—admiration. But we were poor,—*miserably* poor;—poor with that hopeless poverty whose prospects end in a prison, or a grave.

I have sometimes striven to console myself with the belief that Fitzirnham was born with the germ of our national disease. His mother fell an early victim to consumption; and the short feverish cough which, as autumn advanced, began to render his nights sleepless and his days uneasy, might perhaps have attacked him, even had he not been harassed by the importunities of creditors and the bitterness of retrospection.

But, alas! whatever were the contingencies of the case, that which was certain and before my eyes, was a slow miserable disorder, aggravated by a thousand irritations.

I saw Fitzirnham become every day paler, feebler, more emaciated.—His eyes grew larger in their orbits, and more impressive in the earnestness of their expression. His lips were compressed, his nostrils dilated by oppression of breath. Still, he persisted that he was better,—that he was *well*,—that occupation served to divert him;—that a recumbent position being painful, it amused him to sit up and write. Had Fox been in England, so thoughtful was the tenderness of his nature, that he would instantly have discerned the truth, and insisted on a remission of labour. But he and Grey were both in Italy. Burke was settled for the autumn at Beaconsfield, and of too

formal a character to be addressed by letter ; and the rest of Fitzirnham's intimate associates were dispersed for the sporting season, in various parts of the kingdom.

Few of them had followed the Prince to Brighton. The part taken by his Royal Highness in the parliamentary discussion of his affairs, had destroyed the circle of his adherents, who were replaced by buffoons and profligates,—a Barrymore, a Hanger, a Queensbury.

The newspapers teemed with accounts of the exploits of their unmeaning joviality ; their intrusions on public notice at theatres, races, boxing-matches, as performers, not spectators ; while a crowd of foreign libertines, attracted by the favour of the Duke of Orleans, swelled the train of royalty without adding an iota to its dignity.

Yet, revolting as were such traits in the young, handsome, witty, gallant Prince of Wales, what would I not have given that Fitzirnham were still of his society !—Every day, the autumnal fogs of the metropolis grew heavier,—more damp—more chill. Every day, I perceived that change of air and cessation of toil were essential to the invalid. Yet could I have commanded a miserable twenty pounds, instead of effecting his removal, the sum would have been instantly applied by my husband to quiet some pressing creditor.

“ We who are in debt and danger,” he would say, “ must not presume to be fanciful. This climate suffices hundreds of thousands,—it must suffice *me*.”—And when he patted my cheek to enforce the justice of his argument, I could feel every pulse thrilling and throbbing with fever, and hear, in the hollowness of his voice, that his destiny was accomplishing !—

Fitzirnham himself, following the usual impulses of his insidious disease, looked confidently forward. The spring was to restore him. Relieved by relaxation from his parliamentary vigils, he said he was gaining strength, and that the renovation of a milder season would effect the rest. The spring would bring with it the long anticipated India cause,—the trial of Warren Hastings ;—the trial that was to dispense retribution to the oppressors of the East, and immortality to the advocates of its suffering millions.

“ You will not know me again next May,” he sometimes whispered. “ My anxieties will then be repaid. I shall have created to myself a name,—a career. I shall be no longer the adventurer stigmatised by the Duchess of Rochester !”

The medical men whom, on pretence of indisposition on my own part, I called in to pronounce upon his state, did not bid me wholly despair. They saw, I verily believe, how dearly my life was bound up in his, and had not courage to pronounce sentence of death upon two hearts so passionately united. But their forbearance scarcely deceived me.—I saw, if not the hopelessness, the extreme peril of the case.

In the silence of the night, I often heard my husband’s restless steps in the room below ; and, stealing to the door, would seat myself beside it, that he might not be harassed by my watchfulness. Hour after hour have I sat there, my head upon my knees ; listening to the heavy sighs that burst from his bosom,—to the half-smothered invocations of my name,—to still more solemn appeals to the name of the Almighty.—Then came the hectic cough, stifling the words upon his lips,—the moan of pain,—the murmur,—the sob,—the anguish !

One evening that we had been passing together, he suddenly rose from his writing-table, and flinging himself on the sofa, dropped into one of those heavy unrefreshing sleeps characteristic of his disorder.

As soon as I saw him completely overpowered, I stole towards him, and observed with horror the cold dew risen upon his forehead,—the matted clammy hair,—the blue lips,—the eyelids deeply stained by every wandering vein. I heard his struggling respiration,—his heavy sighs.

At length, words burst from his lips, which for a moment I referred to the child that had been taken from us. I drew nearer to listen,—I hung over him ;—and perhaps the movement disturbed his slumber, for he instantly opened his eyes.

“ Is it dead ?” was his involuntary exclamation.

I pressed his hand in silence. It was plain that he had not fully recovered his consciousness.

“ Nay, then—so much the better !” he added. “ Poor

boy—poor child of shame!—It might have lived to brood, like myself, in the solitude of a broken heart."

This could not refer to a babe of ours. I soon discovered that his dreams had been bewildered by an adulatory paragraph contained in our morning paper, referring to the young Duke of Rochester, who had been attacked by some disease of childhood.

"Nothing," these journalists observed, "could exceed the attentions bestowed upon his Grace, who had now entered his third year, by the amiable Duchess his young and lovely mother, and his guardian, Lord Hugh de Vere, only brother of the late Duke of Rochester."

"Admire this, Lizzy!" said Fitzirnham, as, rising from his recumbent position, he recited the announcement. "Admire the chain of social hypocrisies, created by a breach of chastity!—Lord Hugh de Vere, quitting his retirement, his sick-bed, his despondency, to watch over a feeble infant in whose veins not a drop of his blood is flowing—to yearn over it, as all that remains to him of a beloved brother; while *I*—his nephew as much as if fifty dignitaries of the church had consecrated his connexion with my unhappy mother,—am dying here,—alone,—unheeded,—destitute."

I pressed his hand in mine in token of sympathy.

"A wanton woman who deceives her husband," he resumed, "thinks she has done all, and hugs herself in her triumph. Rarely does she deceive the world, which avenges itself not only upon her, but hers; *never* that jealous God, who visits her sins upon the generation her frailty has brought to light!—My mother expired, a victim to remorse. But even this did not suffice. The curse is still upon her son. I belong to nothing—I belong to nobody. On the De Veres, I have no legal, on the Fitzirnhams no moral claim."

"Vex not your mind by such thoughts," said I. "You have made to yourself a name, a destiny, a family. You have an idolising wife. You possess the esteem of all belonging to her. Would you but permit me to lay the state of your circumstances before my brothers—"

"Never!" interrupted Fitzirnham. "If canker be in the heart of the tree let it fall, rather than live supported

by props that shame its nature. But this is no time for discussion," he added, staggering from the sofa towards the table. " My printer is waiting for the copy of these last sections on the Commercial Treaty. I must work till daybreak, Lizzy. I cannot write when morning comes with its interruptions,—its vile, humiliating interruptions,—its duns,—its necessities. Go to bed, my dear girl,—leave me to my occupations."

" I will go on one condition," said I. " Your illness is increasing. It is our duty to neglect no human means of cure. Promise me to see Warren. He attended you in your childhood.—He knows your constitution. Promise me for *my* sake to see him *once*, and abide by his advice."

" Go to bed!" said Fitzirnham, pushing me playfully towards the door. " Are not *your* prognostics dispiriting enough without those of a physician?—Go to bed!"

" I will not stir," I persisted, " till I have your promise. Dearest husband, for this once only,—accede to my entreaty!"

" Be it so!" he replied in a graver tone. " Since you choose to hear my sentence from the lips of the oracle, I consent."

The following day, accordingly, Dr. W. was called in; and long and earnest was the conference between them. But Fitzirnham contrived to circumvent any private interview between myself and the doctor; and, as our position precluded the possibility of requesting a continuance of his visits, I felt that I had gained little by a consultation of the results of which I remained ignorant.

Next day, as I sat at work during Fitzirnham's absence, the carriage of the physician again stopped at my door; and I trembled lest he might have so far mistaken our views, as to consider himself in permanent attendance.

" Mr. Fitzirnham is in Lincoln's Inn," said I, welcoming him in confusion.

" I know it," replied the Doctor. " It is *you*, my dear Madam, I am come to see to-day."

" And, alas! I have scarcely courage to thank you for the visit. I feel that it is not as the bringer of glad tidings you are here."

“ You are mistaken. My errand is ex-professional. I come *as* and *from* a friend. We doctors, you know, are privileged people. It is part of our duty to push our inquiries into the moral as well as the physical causes of disease. We must understand the position of a patient, ere we assign due importance to his symptoms. With this view, I have ventured to extend my surmises respecting your husband, and to take into my confidence one who, like myself, was his father’s friend, and is deeply interested in his welfare. It was at old Fitzirnham’s house in Kent, that, five-and-twenty years ago, I became acquainted with Thurlow; and yesterday, after my interview with your husband, I happened to meet him at Windsor. The Chancellor, in short, is most anxious to see and befriend the son of his old acquaintance. Politics, he says, have hitherto disunited them. But Thurlow has considerable patronage unconnected with politics; and an earnest desire to advance the interests of your husband. But my young friend possesses an oversensitive spirit, rendered doubly irritable by disease; and I should have some difficulty in proposing the question.—You, my dear Madam, must negotiate for us.”

I thanked him, as such goodness merited; but avowed my want of courage to propose to Fitzirnham even an interview with the Lord Chancellor.

“ I will have no refusal!” resumed Dr. W.—“ I undertake no cure unless the mind of my patient can be placed at ease. I do not disguise from you that this young man is in danger,—but I am not altogether without hope. Cooperate with me, and we may save him; save him to be a blessing to yourself, and an ornament to the country.”

That evening, accordingly, I expressed with more seriousness than I had yet ventured to assume towards Fitzirnham, that it was a duty he owed to himself and me, to profit by so bright and unexpected an opening as the overtures of Lord Thurlow.

“ He wishes to entangle me in obligations, to ensure, if not my subservience, my silence,” said Fitzirnham, fractiously.

“ No!—I have authority to assure you, that the ferment he offers is not of a political nature.”

“A living, perhaps?” demanded my husband with a smile. “Or some sepulchre in the colonies, bought with interchange of patronage! What say you, Lizzy? Will you exchange Chesterfield Street, with its body-guard of creditors,—its legion of devils,—for some African consulship? Will you try Sierra Leone for change of air?—Or what think you of Cape Breton or Cape Cod, for a winter season?”

“I say, that you are perverse and ungracious!—Here is a man who would lay aside his political enmities to assist you—”

“My dear Lizzy, I would fain trifle, where it is painful to afford a serious reply. The preferment intended for me may be wholly disconnected with politics. But, given by one of the most eminent political partisans in the kingdom, it ties me down in obligations never to be shaken off. *My* public position is an obscure but a decided one. The friend of Fox and Burke, the once-devoted servant of the Prince, must not accept favours from the Lord Chancellor of the Tories.”

“He must starve, then, with his family?”

“He *must*!—Such is the nature of public virtue. Such is the gulf to which the modern Curtius devotes himself.”

“But, my dear, dear husband,” cried I, “this is no ordeal of political consistency. Lord Thurlow is conscious of obligations to the late Mr. Fitzirnham, and would willingly repay them to yourself.”

“Enough!” interrupted my husband, in a tone that admitted of no reply. “The question is now set at rest. Ask your own heart, Lizzy, whether it is for *me* to receive favours as the son of Mr. Fitzirnham!”—

And, to my infinite mortification, he returned so haughty an answer to the letter addressed to him the following day by the Chancellor, as to preclude all further overtures.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“I HAVE three welcome pieces of intelligence to communicate to my dearest sister,” wrote Harry Mordaunt, at this crisis of my domestic troubles. “First, that I am father of a boy, whose dear mother is doing as well as possible; secondly, that Jane’s engagement to young Rothesbury meets with the unqualified approbation of his family; and thirdly, that I am appointed Secretary to the embassy at Naples. Join with me, dear Lizzy, in thanking Heaven that the prospects of the Mordaunt family are thus strangely brightening. My own marriage, and those of Jane and Helen, are happier and more fortunate than my father could have hoped for in his highest prosperity. Alfred and Richard are advancing rapidly in their professions; while our dear Lizzy, united to a man so excellent and eminent, and established, if not in opulence, at least on the sunny side of the hill, has a life of happiness in enjoyment and distinction in prospect. Under these circumstances, with my mind at rest as to the welfare of my family, I devote all my endeavours to forward the release of our good father. What a triumph to replace the old man in his proper station, and behold him, like Israel of old, go down in honour to the grave, surrounded by his grateful children!”

My heart sank as I perused the exulting words of my brother! I felt that there would be a broken link in the chain he hoped to see united,—a withered flower in the wreath. Heavy sighs burst from my bosom. I dared not look forward. Fitzirnham had distinctly admitted that unless able to fulfil a literary compact for the completion of a History of India, for which he was to receive the price, at that time enormous, of five hundred guineas, he must fail in engagements of the most serious nature.

“I am beginning to fear,” said he, wiping the cold moisture from his forehead as he made the confession,

“that nature is against me;—that, sacrifice myself as I may, the victim will be offered in vain. But—”

I interrupted him to implore permission to address myself to one of my brothers, or to Lady Lavinia.

“Such an appeal would I never forgive you!” was his reply. “I know in how abject a light I have been represented by the Duchess to the Mordaunt and Rawborne families: let not my own wife place me in that of a beggar. For the first time, I assume a husband’s authority, and *forbid* you to make such applications. Will you obey me?”

“I will!”

“On your word, then, I rely,” said he; “and were I to discover that you had broken faith with me—”

He was interrupted. Dick Sheridan, accidentally in town for a day or two, dropped in to take an unceremonious dinner with us. “Ill, and under the care of a physician?” cried he, after our first words of greeting. “We were all puzzling ourselves to guess what could keep you drowsing your autumn away in Chesterfield Street. But, my dear Fitz., profoundly as I bow to Warwick Lane, my faith in fresh air is infinitely greater! You are sadly fallen away; you ought to be in the country. A milder climate would restore you at once. Suppose you try a trip to France?”

“And my constituents?”—said my husband, with a ghastly smile.

“All that might be readily managed,” cried Sheridan. “Lord Fitzwilliam, so much your friend, and the most gentlemanly and amiable of men, would facilitate every arrangement; and—”

“No! I hold to my seat in Parliament, and am pledged next session to Burke on the Hastings business,” said Fitzirnham, his pride rebelling against an avowal of the truth. Half an hour afterwards, they were deep in politics, deep in constitutional questions; deep in the projects of Carlton House, and obstinacies of Windsor. A few fatal glasses of claret served to impart to the countenance of my husband a factitious lustre, long banished. Sheridan had his merry tale to tell of the royal sailor, Prince William, who, following the example of his elder

brothers, had fallen into debt and love, and been kidnapped out of the way of mischief into the command of the *Andromeda*, on the West India station ; or rather *out* of what Sheridan was pleased to call “the Way to *Wynne* him.” He had his anecdotes, too, of the *Steyne*, with its smock-races of *Sussex Atalantas*, to supply laughter to the Prince and a betting-book to Lord *Barrymore* ; and the marine exploits of his Royal Highness, who, accompanying the *Marquis de Conflans* to the packet in which he was about to sail for France, dragged the hydrophobic Frenchman through wind and tide, into full two fathom of salt water.

The idle details of still idler practices, were related with so much whim and drollery, that we laughed heartily at Sheridan’s recitals. None who could have seen my husband, that evening, would have suspected him to be on the brink of the grave. None who could have listened to the mirth of his miserable wife, would have guessed that her heart was breaking !

Next day, *Fitzirnham* was confined to his bed, with an accession of fever. The excess of the preceding night, and a slight cold caught in taking leave of Sheridan, while the hall-door stood open to admit the night air, hung heavily upon him. His voice was reduced to a hoarse whisper, and his eyes seemed to burn with unnatural brilliancy. Stationed by his bedside, I watched his snatches of restless slumber, and listened to murmured ejaculations of delirious excitement.

“No, no !” he faltered. “The first exercise of your paternal authority over me must not be the interdiction of our marriage. *Miss Mordaunt* is good—pure—innocent ; you have been deceived by one far less innocent,—less pure. The letter was none of hers.—The letter was for the *Duchess*!—*Lizzy*, the paramour of Lord *Pembury*?—Look at home—look nearer to you,—look nearer, I say,—look *nearest*!—The child is the child of Lord *Pembury*,—let the *Duchess* deny it if she dare!”—Then, seizing my arm, as I leant over and strove to tranquillise him, he bad me remove those hateful pistols, and wipe away that stream of blood ;—that he had murdered his father,—that he had murdered the *Duke of Rochester*!—

Much as I dreaded to expose his condition to observation, I sent immediately for Warren ; a man too kind to resent our former ungraciousness.

"I prescribed rest," said he, reprovingly, after seeing the sufferer. "I insisted on quiet and temperance. And this man has been sitting up,—reading, working, talking, wine-drinking,—all, acts of madness in his present state. The little hope I saw grounds to cherish, is extinct. But if you love him, and I see and know you do, remove from him as far as possible all causes of excitement.—I will not answer for the consequences of any shock or agitation."

All that night, Fitzirnham's mind was rambling. All that night, I watched by his pillow, listening to every breath he drew ; and trembling lest I should discern increase of perturbation. But, alas ! no sooner did morning dawn, than there were loud voices in the hall ; voices of angry creditors, which I knew might bring death to Fitzirnham. I flew down in my dressing-gown, hoping to pacify the disturbance ; and addressed them, intreating indulgence.

They threatened ; for they saw the state of terror to which I was reduced. From arrest, my husband was secured as a member of Parliament. But they talked of an execution, in a tone intended to reach the ear of the victim.

A happy thought struck me. I hastened to place in the hands of the roughest of my menacers, the valuable set of pearls presented to me on my marriage by my father, as well as every other trinket in my possession.

"I do not want *these*,—I want my money," said the man, softened or ashamed. "Every honest tradesman wants his money. I have a family of my own to whom I must do justice. But, since you seem desirous to see me righted, promise me on your own account that my claim shall be paid at Christmas, and I will desist from legal proceedings."

Christmas was still a month distant ;—I promised, and my word was accepted.—I accompanied the men to the street-door.—I longed to see them quit the house, and assure myself that no danger of further interruption existed. All the pride of Lizzy of Spetchingley was past

and forgotten. Willingly would I have sat all day upon the door-steps, to have insured unmolested tranquillity to Fitzirnham.

But measures for immediate relief were indispensable. My husband lay insensible on what was likely to be his death-bed; and I had not ten guineas in the house to meet the exigencies of the moment!—Tradesmen were clamorous; servants insolent. My pledge to my husband to refrain from applying to my family, extended only to my brothers and sisters, and Lady Lavinia. There had been no mention of Algernon—Algernon, whom at any other time I should have shrunk from addressing. But, with a dying husband before my eyes, how could I hesitate?

A fortnight, however, must elapse, before I could receive an answer to the letter. For that period, I trusted I was safe; and it was no small comfort when, in the course of the following evening, Fitzirnham in waking from a long and refreshing sleep, appeared completely sensible.

“It is strange,” whispered he, after having taken a sedative from my hands, “but throughout this long sleep, I seem to have retrograded into the past. I have lived over again that dreadful interview with the Duke of Rochester,—written over again that frantic letter of accusation against the Duchess;—and again seemed to quit his presence, and set off for the north, to seek at Vere Court the old servant who, he told me, was his confidant and my mother’s. But a moment ago, I fancied myself once more overtaken on the road by Algernon Rawborne, and brought back to London,—to Rochester House,—to the inquest,—that my presence might free me from the imputation of murder. My heart still thrills within me, Lizzy, as it did when your cousin unfolded that accursed history.—Poor Algernon!—What a friend!—What a man!—How few such in the world!—And we are fated to see his face no more!”

There was a mournful intonation in Fitzirnham’s voice, which, united with the consciousness of my recent communication with Algernon, rendered it impossible to reply.

“Lizzy,” he continued, gently taking my hand in his, and turning upon me those eyes whose wistful expression still haunts my remembrance,—“when I am gone, you will marry your cousin.—Yes, dearest! Make no disavowal,—no rash vows!—I will not hear them, I will not receive them.—You will marry Algernon, and be happy. Happiness, dearly as I have loved you, was not for *us*. Happiness is incompatible with poverty. From the day of our marriage, my thoughts have been of gain,—of thrift: not for my own sake, dear wife, but yours. For this, I have often neglected your society,—have renounced the warmest inclinations of my heart,—have sacrificed my time,—have withered my constitution. And how has it all availed?—What place in society have I been able to assign to her who ought to have been its queen?—My sweet wife! it is the sense of these mortifications which has undone me,—by making my bread bitter and my pillow sleepless. And now I die,—still young,—the promises of the world unfulfilled,—the Civic crown almost within my grasp;—knowing that with another you will taste those sweets of prosperity which to *me* it was denied to afford you.”

“And *who* will ever make so vast a sacrifice for my sake,” cried I, “as he who refused the benefits of the Duke of Rochester when offered as a bribe for the renunciation of my hand!”—

“Say rather, who sacrificed his father to vindicate your honour,” murmured the feeble sufferer. “Lizzy! I better estimate *now* the feelings of a husband.—I should not *now* have courage to redress even *your* fair fame at such a cost!—I knew not then that there was death in such revelations!”

“Not another word,” said I, laying my hand upon his lips. “I have Warren’s orders that there shall be no agitation in the sick-room he has placed under my control. I remain here this night by your side, only on condition that you recur to no afflicting reminiscences.”

“Have I anything more cheering in *prospect*?” was his reply. “Death is drawing near. Yet near as it is, fearful troubles may intervene. To-morrow may bring sheriffs’ officers into the house.—Lizzy,—help me to

rise,—help me to draw my writing-table to the fire.—I am strong enough to work—I—”

And, in attempting only to raise himself from his pillow, he fell back, exhausted.

“ Give me something to support me, dearest !” said he. “ Give me opium.—I have had recourse to it before, when my anguish became insupportable.

“ You will never have it from *me*,” said I, pressing his fevered hand to my bosom, and bathing it with tears. “ You must rest. It is night, Fitzirnham.—All the world is asleep.—Why should you, an ailing, suffering man, exempt yourself from the general blessing ?”—

“ Because in my labour abides *your* life ! My funds are exhausted.—I have no money for you, Lizzy—I have—”

“ Be calm,—be calm !” said I, almost frantic with terror at witnessing his excitement. “ All is well. I have money.—I own it with shame, I have been a hoarder.—I have enough for all our present needs.”

“ God be thanked !” ejaculated Fitzirnham, faintly, while the tears rolled slowly down his wan cheeks. “ Then in peace of conscience, I may enjoy a night’s sleep.” And, in less than half an hour, his feeble head was lying on my arm, absorbed in profound repose.—Oh ! how I gloried in the success of my first bold breach of truth !

When Warren visited him the following day, his keener eye discerned no subject for gratulation in the altered aspect of his patient ; and, taking me aside, he bad me, if Fitzirnham had any affairs needing arrangement, to lose no time in providing him with professional assistance.

“ He must die, then ?” said I, pouring my whole soul into the glance I fixed upon the face of him in whose hands was my destiny.

“ His danger, I confess, is imminent.—The change must be visible to *yourself* ?”

“ But *must* he die ?—Do not trifle with me,—do not measure your expressions !—When my child was expiring, you and others strove to cheer me to the last moment with flattering promises. Do not deceive me *now* !—Answer me, Doctor. Look me in the face and answer me,—*will he die* ?”

“*He will!*” replied the good man, folding my hands in his.—“But on yourself depends the mode and moment of the event. Exercise all your self-command; or the sight of such uncontrolled sorrow as I am now witnessing, will hasten the event, and embitter the last moments you have to spend together.”

They were measured then, those moments,—I dared not inquire to how limited a span!

“*Lizzy!*” murmured Fitzirnham, when I hastened to him, after Warren’s departure, “let not professional plausibilities deceive you. If they tell you, as they do *me*, that I am better, they do you wrong.—Be not mistaken. I have not many days to live.”

“You say this only to exercise your tyranny over my feelings,” said I, endeavouring to smile. “But you shall not alarm me, dearest, when there are no grounds for alarm.” While I spoke thus cheerfully, however, my eyes fell upon his face; and his saddened expression struck me with such anguish, that I had scarcely time to escape from the room to stifle my sobs. I came back, to watch by him—to tell him the hour of the night which again and again he demanded,—*not* with peevishness, not with weariness,—but with the deep consciousness that the moments were passing from us,—*our* moments!—Within a few short hours, *he* would be beyond the reach of human suffering,—and I—a grieving widow,—helpless, lonely,—desolate!—

“Morning at last!”—he faltered, when the cold gray straggling light of a winter’s day broke into his chamber. “How cheerless,—how dreary!—I had always wished to part from the world in summer;—to take my last view of it with a smile upon its face.—I hoped that in every returning season of flowers and sunshine, my friends would be reminded of my departure. But even this, *Lizzy*, is denied me. When the cheerless winter comes again, you will say—It was thus the wind howled,—thus cold,—thus desolate was the weather, when he died!—Do not weep, my own love!—Do not weep, wife, whom I would fain have made happy,—rich,—great!—Could I have survived but one short year, *Lizzy*,—nay, but a few months, I might have bequeathed you an honourable

memory. But I have laboured in vain.—I shall have lived only to be forgotten.—No! precious love, bid me not be silent. I *must* speak now,—now, at the eleventh hour preceding the everlasting midnight of the grave.”—

But, alas! nature’s admonishments were sterner than mine. Exhaustion soon repressed the ramblings of fever. It was not till after a long gasping pause that he added, in a solemn tone—“God is merciful, dear wife. God deals not with his creatures as they deal with each other.—Deep are my self-accusations,—of wasted hours,—talents unimproved,—means wantonly squandered that should have ministered to the good of my fellow-creatures.—Yet great as are these offences, greater still is my reliance on the patience and long-suffering of the Almighty.—My feet that have been wandering by the wayside, will find rest at last!”—

I pressed his cold hand to my eyes,—my heart—

“The struggle of parting life may be a hard one,” he added in a still fainter voice. “Mortal anguish may overcome me. But console yourself hereafter with the knowledge that my sufferings were of the flesh; and that hope and reverence are in my soul!”

I seized the opportunity to suggest the attendance of abler and more authorised comforters than myself.—He looked earnestly and in silence upon me for some minutes, as if studying the motives of my request, or perhaps examining his own state of worthiness to receive spiritual comfort. But, at that moment, a strange voice sounded indistinctly from below; and, trembling lest it should meet his ear, I summoned his usual attendant, and hastily quitted the room.

Yes,—it was as I feared!—In the hall was a lawyer’s clerk, struggling with the servant for admittance, and insisting on an interview with Mr. Fitzirnham.

“You cannot see him to-day,” said I, striving to appear composed, lest he should suspect the urgency of the case and become more peremptory.—“Mr. Fitzirnham is seriously ill.”

“The more necessary that I should speak to him directly,” cried the man, raising his voice.

“Impossible!” said I. “The physicians have forbidden him to enter into any kind of business.”

“There are some sorts of business that must take their course, in spite of the doctors!” cried the clerk, evidently misled by my disordered dress and haggard looks, into mistaking me for a servant. “So just step up to your master, and tell him without preamble that—”

“Hush, hush!—Lower, I intreat you!” cried I;—“Mr. Fitzirnham will hear you.”—

“The sooner the better. No need of keeping my business a secret,” he exclaimed, in a still louder key.—“Let the whole house hear me.”

A bell rang violently in the room above.

“I beseech,—I implore you,” said I, “be patient! All I ask is that Mr. Fitzirnham’s last moments may not be disturbed,—you shall have all of which we are possessed.”

“Do I speak, then, to Mrs. Fitzirnham?” demanded the man, removing his hat.

“You do.—*Pray* do not detain me!” cried I,—for as I opened the dining-room to admit him to a more confidential interview, the bell of Fitzirnham’s room was again and still more violently rung. “I will give up all my rights,—you shall have everything.—Only quit the house, and let me go to my dying husband.”

“You mistake me, Madam, altogether,” replied the young man, now assuming a respectful tone, while his face betrayed extreme emotion. “I am employed by Mr. Fitzirnham’s solicitors to acquaint him, that an ulterior will of the late Duke of Rochester has come to light, fully establishing his claim to a legacy of thirty thousand pounds. We are instructed by Lord Hugh de Vere, to apprise our client that he is prepared as executor to—”

I heard no more.—Again, the bell rung furiously.—The servant, who had already rushed up stairs to answer the summons of the nurse, met me with a look of dismay on the landing-place. A strong smell of vinegar struck me as I entered the room. The servants were busy round the bed.—The sheets were stained with blood!—

“Gently, gently. Raise his head,—give him air!” were the first words that met my ear. “How could you

let that noise keep on below!—It was in the agitation of trying to follow my mistress that he burst the blood-vessel!” exclaimed the nurse.

I staggered to the bedside. Fitzirnham’s eyes were fixed,—but he was still sensible.—He knew me as I fell on my knees by his bedside, and prayed aloud.

But it was a look of distress,—of despair with which he recognised me. I had no thought *then* to tell him of our change of fortunes. His soul was departing. He felt that he was leaving me,—leaving me to trouble—*to want!*—One deep—deep sigh—

“*Gone!*” cried I, almost maddened when I saw the nurse, with an unmoved countenance, close those eyes,—those eyes of tenderness and love.—“Oh! no—not, *not* gone,—not gone now that our troubles are over!—Come back to me,—my companion, my friend,—my husband!—Listen to me,—hear me!”—

But he heard me not,—he was never to hear me more. And, throwing myself beside him, I clung convulsively to the form no longer conscious of my anguish,—my endearments,—my despair!—



CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOR some time, total insensibility afforded a relief to my sufferings. But consciousness came at last,—and I was alone—alone in the world!—It was already night; for in the room in which I had been placed, lights were burning. A vague idea beset my bewildered mind, of duties to be fulfilled,—of orders to be given.—But I had been fore stalled.—Ere I could rise, a stranger entered my room;—a stranger of grave aspect, who had installed himself with authority under my roof. And, as he approached and the light fell on his distorted form and benignant countenance, I recognised—Lord Hugh de Vere!—

“I should have been in this house before. But it is

not too late to atone my fault," said he, taking me tenderly by the hand. "On learning from the person who visited you this morning the fate of my brother's son, I remembered, amid many unavailing regrets, that there yet survived one who was dear to him, to whom justice might be rendered. I am here, my dear Mrs. Fitzirnham, to fulfil your orders.—Tell me! how can I assist you?"

"Let me go to him,—I want to look on him again!" was all I could reply.

"You are not yet strong enough for such an effort!"

"I am, I am—I *must* look on him again!" I repeated,—wringing my hands when it occurred to me that officious friends might have already rendered it impossible.

"Compose yourself, and you *shall* see him," replied Lord Hugh; and, supporting me with the tenderness of a father, he led me into the cold, silent chamber, set forth in the fearful array of death. I did not weep a single tear. I did not utter a single cry. I felt not as if approaching the husband I loved!—I was in the presence of the sanctified, the immortal!—I removed the sheet; and, not daring to look upon the face of the dead, took into my bosom that hand,—that cold, listless hand of clay, whose fervent clasp had been so dearly mine;—that hand which had so truly redeemed every pledge offered at the altar,—which had sustained me,—laboured for me.—No! oh, no!—I cannot write of this!—

I laid down my head at his feet!—It was not mere affection that thrilled through my soul; it was veneration—a more than religious reverence. Lord Hugh, terrified by my silence, at length approached the bed.

"Fear not to look upon him," said he, gently removing the handkerchief from those beloved features, in the hope of drawing forth my tears. But on the first glance, a shriek burst from my bosom. That cold, calm, passionless face, so changed from the bright, vivid countenance of my beloved, seemed to apprise me for the first time that he was lost to me for ever!

"Look!" cried I, wildly snatching the hand of Lord Hugh. "Look at that tranquil smile,—that happy smile. Yet he died in distress,—he died in despair, yes! *in despair*; harassed by creditors,—threatened with want—

disowned by the family of his father. And now you come to relent over his remains!"

"The hand of God hath been in this!" said Lord Hugh in a solemn voice. "But yesterday did the last letter of my brother come to light, unmasking the intrigues of the Duchess,—proclaiming the illegitimacy of the child she was to bring forth,—securing a provision for your husband, and commanding me to undertake towards him the *part of a father*. Alas! it was already too late.—God hath done this;—even that jealous God, who willeth not that the marriage-vows spoken at his holy altar, shall be spoken in vain!"

"Is this a place to speak of such things?" I murmured;—as if allusion to this hateful subject might yet impart a pang to Fitzirnham!

The first question referred to me by Lord Hugh de Vere, regarded the place of sepulture of his nephew.

"If it would afford you satisfaction to have him lie with the De Veres," he began—

"Never!" was my reply. "While he yet lived, their affection would have sustained him. It would provoke idle inquiries were they now to extend their arms to welcome a corpse."

A testamentary paper was found in his desk, bequeathing all and everything he possessed to myself—even the choice of his grave! I recollect that, at a time when we were so poor that the concession was great, he had acceded to my request that our infant should be laid at Spetchingley: and thither, I now desired he might be carried. I could not have borne that Fitzirnham should be buried in London, where there is so little deference for the dead. Lord Hugh insisted on bearing me company in the mournful ceremony; and, in frost and snow, on a stormy night in January, we reached the old Hall, where the funeral train was to rest for the night; the desolate, deserted Hall, now only too aptly fitted for so melancholy a purpose.

What a return home!—What a welcome to Spetchingley!—I had so often anticipated with Fitzirnham the day when we should visit the place together, and explore the beloved haunts of my youth!—And now, all was over!—I had

brought down my husband to Spetchingley ; but it was to lay him in the sepulchre of my fathers !

They placed the coffin in the great drawing-room,—the room where, in my happy childhood, I had played at my mother's feet. And now I was kneeling there, a widow, beside the coffin of my husband !

In that gloomy hour, my heart was not as it should have been. There was nothing humble,—nothing submissive in my grief. I arraigned the goodness of GOD. I felt that we had been hardly dealt with. Fitzirnham, so good—so noble,—so fitted to be an ornament to human nature, had been tortured into the grave, and mocked with riches showered on his senseless remains. All he had suffered—all he had resigned—all he had deserved, recurred to my mind ; and bitterness and upbraiding mingled with my widow's tears.

I watched all night.—The morning came, that was to lay him in the grave.—I went down into the vault. I chose a place for him beside our babe, at the feet of my mother.—I knelt down and said farewell,—and left him there,—and went back into the breathing world alone,—alone,—*alone!*

How was it all ?—I seem to struggle with my recollections'—I have an indistinct consciousness that three persons descended into the vault: the widow,—Lord Hugh who attended as chief mourner,—and Richard Mordaunt, the priest who officiated in the last rites. But there was a fourth, whose arm sustained me in ascending those dark damp steps,—one who, enfolded in a mourning cloak, had stood listening overwhelmed with sorrow, to the solemn service.

No matter !—*Whose* presence or whose absence could grieve or afflict me now ? *His* voice was silenced.—*His* smile was darkened. *His* bright aspirings were extinguished!—I had nothing left to love or live for. I was solitary on the face of the earth !—



CHAPTER XXIX.

FIVE years passed slowly away, and I was still a widow,—a widow of six-and-twenty years by computation of time,—of sixty, by tale of sorrow and suffering. Rich beyond my desires, not a member of my family but was basking in the sunshine of prosperity.

To my desolate home in Chesterfield Street, Lord Hugh de Vere never permitted me to return. He took me to his house and home, as his adopted daughter; and even bestowed upon me by legal right, as his heiress, the name of De Vere.

“ You are weary of the follies of the world,” said he, when, after a month’s sojourn at Penderels, I talked of returning to town. “ Like the dove of Scripture, you have sought rest for your foot, and found none. But if seclusion and the dulness of a valetudinarian’s life do not alarm you, remain at Penderels, and comfort the remnant of my days, as it was my hope your husband would have done.”

Lord Hugh had other motives than those of mere humanity for desiring my society. The documents left by the late Duke, though adequate to establish in the mind of his brother all they tended to assert, were insufficient for any legal purpose. A jury had recorded, that the Duke was suffering under mental derangement at the period of writing his testamentary letter. It was thus finally invalidated. But the case was sufficiently strong to admit of being placed at the disposal of a court of law; and the Duchess, rather than venture the exposure, submitted to a compromise. To preserve her son from disinheritance, she consented that her daughters should pass six months of the year under the roof of their uncle, who clung with feelings of the deepest tenderness to all that remained of his brother.

And thus, while it was important to secure as a companion, fitted to preside over the society of his nieces,

one against whom the Duchess could raise no personal objection, their annual visit to Penderels became to myself a source of the deepest enjoyment. For I cherished in those lovely girls at once the nieces of my mother, and the sisters of Fitzirnham.

Into the presence of Lord Hugh, the Duchess never dreamed of intruding. She was too much in his power to provoke animosity which might precipitate her in a moment from her high place in society. The same feelings which had brought her a suppliant to my feet while the inquest on the Duke of Rochester was pending, rendered her subservient to the wishes of her brother-in-law. She had spared neither threat nor entreaty to obtain possession of the letter removed by one of his foreign domestics from the library of the Duke, in the confusion following the discovery of his dreadful end. But the man chose to make sure the payment of his annuity, (the only bribe in the power of her Grace to bestow,) by retaining possession of the document; and, having discovered that she was taking measures to effect his removal from England through the Alien Office, he threw himself into the hands of Lord Hugh de Vere, to whom he supposed the secret as important as to the Duchess.

Had the dispute between these worthy confederates occurred only a few months earlier, the discovery of their treachery might have been the means of preserving the life of Fitzirnham! But his destiny was otherwise appointed. Fortune and fame alike eluded his grasp. Hastings's trial, which occurred scarcely two months after his death, presented opportunities of distinction which would have immortalised his name; and the laurels gathered by Burke and Sheridan, had their root in the labours of Fitzirnham.

“Behold the fruit of *his* vigils,—*his* researches!” said I, while reading aloud to Lord Hugh the details of that memorable trial;—“and how would the brilliancy of Sheridan and energy of Burke have been surpassed, had the voice, long silent, been uplifted in this mighty cause!”

I have now reached an epoch of my life which renewed, in the death of my benefactor, my earlier grief. Lord Hugh expired in all the sanctity of a Christian vocation;

grateful for the happiness I had bestowed on his declining years, and bequeathing to me, with the estate of Penderels and his whole fortune, a recommendation to the Duchess of Rochester to place her daughters as much as possible under my protection. And thus, at six-and-twenty, I became rich and independent; and in Mrs. De Vere of Penderels, no trace remained of Lizzy Mordaunt,—still less of Mrs. Fitzirnham. In the one character, I had been self-engrossed,—in the other, engrossed by tender affection. I was now estranged even from myself, by feelings of misanthropic bitterness. I despised the world which bowed at the feet of a Duchess of Rochester. I despised the world which had suffered such a man as Fitzirnham to pass away undistinguished. The splendid mansions of her Grace were still the resort of the fashionable, the wise, the witty; and from Isabella and Helena De Vere I found that, still beautiful and holding high ascendancy in society, her Grace was surrounded by admirers. The young Duke, just entering his eighth year, was under the care of a private tutor; while the two elder girls shared with their mother the homage of the fashionable world. Adeline, Susan, and Maria, still in the school-room, were my frequent guests at Penderels.

But, important as were the changes effected in the immediate circle of my family, those of public life had assumed a far more remarkable character. France was now a Republic, and the Prince of Wales, a married man; while England—to borrow the expression of the Indian Chief of the Creek nation in his palaver with Mr. Panton—had for “years been in confusion and distress, occasioned by *bad talks sent into it.*”

I have lived through momentous epochs of History. I have seen Crowns rise and fall in value, like public securities or foreign speculations; and now, sitting with my cat on my knee, and my silver hairs gathered under my dowager’s coif, I begin to trace effects to their causes; bringing to mind the Right Divine degraded in the eyes of nations by the physical infirmity of one sovereign and the moral frailty of another; by the humiliation of Windsor Castle, the orgies of Carlton House; the

levity of Versailles, and the despotism of the Tuilleries. But, at the period I write of, it was the fashion to ascribe the revolutionary tendencies of the day to the sanguinary impulses of the French nation. All England,—all Europe,—united against a government whose ends were compassable only by means so ghastly. The patrician world was in a state of dismay; for the marble tramp of the spectre, Retribution, was heard approaching its banquet-hall!

The Carlton House party had been the first to dissolve. If its politics were liberal, its tendencies were undeniably aristocratic; and to these, the energetic eloquence of Burke so strongly appealed, that thenceforward it seemed to argue want of chivalry to remain on the popular side.

“Edmund was right to desert to the royal standard,” said Charles Fox, advertiring, some years afterwards, to Burke’s change of opinion. “Such was his tendency to extremes, that had *he* remained with the people, he would have never rested till he was hanged.”

Soon afterwards, the opening of the Scheldt affording pretext for a national quarrel, the Duke of York was dispatched with an army into Holland; Lord Moira having previously attempted his Quixotic expedition to the coast of France. But all ended ill; and, with the exception of Lord Howe’s glorious victory of the first of June, British valour had little to boast of.

When the close of my mourning re-opened the gates of Penderels to those guests especially recommended to my friendship by its late lord, the general topic of conversation was the new Princess of Wales; who, wedded at Brunswick by the Earl of Malmesbury as proxy for the Prince, was expected in England for the re-solemnisation of her nuptials. Even by those whom the interests of the succession rendered eager for the match, (the union of the Duke and Duchess of York having proved heirless,) a small measure of domestic happiness was predicted to the young Princess of Brunswick. An attachment for an officer of high rank belonging to the household of the Duke her father, had induced her to refuse the hand of the Hereditary Prince, afterwards King of Prussia; and, though parental authority and

the reported merits and attractions of her cousin the Prince of Wales at length surmounted her repugnance to an English throne, little good was expected from an alliance commencing under such evil auspices.

The *éclat* with which, in my girlhood, the Prince was surrounded, had long been tarnished. The transfer of his political confidence from Fox to the heavy, feeble Duke of Portland,—his ostracism from the sporting world,—and the mercurial nature of his attachments, dissipated all *prestige* of chivalry and romance. He stood before the tribunal of society as a prince starved into matrimony;—wedding, against his will and against his judgment, to secure payment for his debts and the means of further extravagance. Even the elements seemed to oppose this Brunswick alliance. Admiral Payne, who had sailed for the Elbe to receive the royal bride, remained fog-bound on the coast.

It was in the interval between the marriage of the Princess and her arrival in England, that I was myself summoned to take my part in a family event, far more interesting to my feelings. Harry Mordaunt and his wife had been some months settled in England, summoned from Naples by the sudden demise of Lady Lavinia, which placed them in enjoyment of the greater part of her fortune; Lavinia Shanstone having offended her mother by a match with a Jacobite laird of the Roman Catholic persuasion. Thus raised to opulence, my brother had obtained my father's permission to become his tenant at Spetchingley; and it was Harry's wish that the whole Mordaunt family should be re-united under his roof, in honour of this installation. The Ailesfords, and Sir Charles and Lady Rothesbury, with their infant families,—Captain Mordaunt and his new epaulettes,—Richard, the portly prebendary,—and my solitary self,—were to be once more gathered together. It was, I concluded, in deference to my father's reluctance to see his son take possession of his birth-right during his lifetime, that I heard no mention of *his* name or that of Mrs. Mordaunt.

Every year since the death of my husband, I had devoted some days to a pilgrimage to his grave, so that the immediate impression of my melancholy journey was

in some degree subsiding. I had even found leisure to note with grief, year after year, the dilapidation produced by the prolonged absence of the owners. It was now eight years since the old hall was abandoned by the family; during which, immediate profit had formed the sole object of the trustees; and the ornamental department was suffered to run to ruin. The summer preceding Lord Hugh's decease, I visited Spetchingley at a moment when the gardens were in all their exuberance of summer blossom; when the lime-trees of the old avenues drooped their unpruned branches on the damp road; when the gum-cistus shrubs, in showering bloom, obscured the windows of the sitting-rooms; and the jessamine and passion-flower, which overgrew the old-fashioned western front, straggling forth in all directions, imparted to the house, at a distance, the air of some sylvan monster. Yet the fruit-gardens, as a source of gain, were in perfect order!

These neglects must of course have been remedied since the return of my brother; and as it was winter I could no longer expect to see entanglements of roses connecting the walks into labyrinths. Yet, I confess, I was startled on beholding a new and handsome lodge in place of the decaying tenement I had left; and on driving to the hall-door, to perceive that the mansion had undergone complete reparation, subject to the ancient Elizabethan style of the original structure.

Within, every step increased my delight and surprise. In the hall, beautiful windows of stained glass, perpetuating the armorial bearings of the family, were substituted for the narrow panes. The family pictures had been cleaned and restored; and the whole house, (with the exception of the sacred room known as Lady Betty's,) handsomely and appropriately re-furnished. In one small gallery, my brother had collected portraits of the whole surviving Mordaunt family: among others, Sherwin's sketch of Diana, representing the giddy Mrs. Fitzirnham!

Clara, accompanied by her two handsome boys, met me with a smiling countenance in the hall. "Should you find anything to disapprove in the changes and improvements at Spetchingley," said she, "tell it me, dear Lizzy, when we are alone, and I will see whether it can be

remodelled. But do not mortify Harry by a word of censure. For months past, his whole soul has been engaged in completing the restoration of the place; and it would grieve him that even the smallest of his arrangements gave offence in the family."

It was easy to promise compliance, for fastidious indeed must have been the taste that could raise objections. Spetchingley now presented the perfect type of an old English mansion-house, modernised to the utmost luxury of comfort. My two sisters accompanied us in our tour of the house; and there was only one small suite of rooms situated in what we used to call the nursery-wing, that was closed against our scrutiny.

"Harry has the key of those rooms," said my sister-in-law. "But they contain only old furniture."

It was the last night of the year; and though tired by our journey, we sat round the fire till a late hour, laughing and chatting; rallying my brother Alfred on his travellers' wonders and thrice-told tale of the miracles of the first of June; and Sir Charles and Lady Rothesbury, whose marriage was of scarcely a year's date, upon the long continuance of their honey-moon. On separating for the night, Harry made it his request, that we should meet him by ten o'clock at the breakfast table, to welcome in the new year.

Roused at an early hour by the cheerful village bells, —proclaiming the dawn of a new year, so auspicious to Spetchingley, I observed, in looking out into the park, that there were more passengers, on foot and horseback, than even the privileged season of hospitality seemed to warrant; and felt persuaded that something unusual was going on. Having dressed in haste to be down and questioning among the rest, from the window of the great stairs a spectacle of a novel kind struck me with amazement. Nearly a hundred decently dressed persons were drawn up on either side of the gates of the court-yard, with boughs of holly in their hands; and as I stood wondering at so much ceremony, two horsemen rode up, and took their station at the same point. Beyond, as far as my eye could reach, extended a line of mounted yeomen, through which I saw advancing, a carriage-and-four, the

postilions of which wore the livery of my family. A loud huzza instantly burst from the assembled crowd ; and boughs, and hats, and handkerchiefs were waved, with cries of "Welcome back!—Welcome back!"—"Long live 'Squire Mordaunt of Spetchingley!"—

I flew down to the hall, where my brothers and sisters, and their children, were already waiting. All but Harry. My brother had been off at day-break to Leicester, to meet the old man his father, and bring him back in triumph to the seat of his ancestors ; every debt discharged, —every incumbrance paid off,—every arrangement made for him and Mrs. Mordaunt to resume their place at the head of the establishment !

Harry and Clara were to be their guests. But in order to remove every feeling of embarrassment on the part of the 'Squire, my brother had accepted the appointment of Minister Plenipotentiary to the court of Sardinia, which he intended to hold till the venerable man felt once more thoroughly at home.

Never shall I forget the delight with which I beheld my gray-headed father assisted from the carriage by his excellent son ! Not a stranger had been permitted to enter the court-yard, that the old man's emotions might not become a spectacle to the multitude. Not even a servant was in attendance. He was alone with his wife and children, when he fell upon my brother's neck, and lifted up his voice and wept !—

I am wrong. There *was one* individual present, who, though not a son, had done a son's duty towards the 'Squire ; and when, in visiting every corner of the old mansion, my father noticed that not only Lady Betty's favourite chamber had been respected, but that a snug suite of rooms in the nursery wing was fitted up with the furniture from Dick Mordaunt's cottage, while a key, bearing his name and arms, marked his proprietorship of the little tenement ; he laid hold of Harry's hand, with a look such as must have found registry in Heaven, in attestation of the virtues of my brother.

The 'Squire was soon seated in his favourite library, with Mrs. Mordaunt hanging over his chair ; his children round him, and *their* children at his feet ; nay ! with a fine

Snyders-looking hound extended on the hearthrug, who answered to the name of her grandam, "Ladybird." There was young Harry Mordaunt and young Algernon Mordaunt, and little Lord Clareville with his sister Lady Elizabeth Ailesfort—and a babe in a flowing mantle which Lady Rothesbury's anxious face plainly pointed out as her own.

The reverend Richard was making a long set speech of compliment to his brother, garnished with quotations; while Harry's happy eyes wandered ever and anon to Clara, who looked beautiful with the beauty of perfect happiness,—perfect *goodness!* —

I alone stood somewhat behind the rest. I rejoiced indeed with *their* joy, but mine was imperfect. I had no child to present for my father's blessing, and to inherit the virtues of such a race. He whose hand should have been in mine, even as those of the rest were clasped together, was in the cold chancel whose lofty tower was seen through the opening vista; and tears of bitterness started to my eyes at the thought of my lost Fitzirnham.

"Lizzy!" cried the old man, missing me,—in the fond fatherly voice of other years,—"Where is Lizzy?"

I threw myself into his arms.

"Lizzy!" faltered my father in his now broken voice, while a tear fell from his withered cheek upon my own. "Lady Betty would have been a happy woman had she lived to see this day;—a proud woman—a happy woman. But good mothers make good children!"

CHAPTER XXX.

HENRY and his wife were to pass two months in London previous to their departure for Italy; and, at my brother's desire, I took this opportunity of leaving Penderels to undergo those repairs which the long indisposition of Lord Hugh had procrastinated, and engaged a house in town for the season. Two quarters of the metropolis I

was bent upon avoiding,—the neighbourhood of Bedford Square, and that of Chesterfield Street. My new abode was therefore on the outskirts of London ; one of the newly-built houses in Cumberland Place, near Hyde Park.

It was still winter, and in the memory of man so severe a season had not been recorded. The Thames was frozen over. Every week brought tidings of some severe disaster. Yet desolate as was the weather when I reached town, I found it already full of the idle and gay ; awaiting the fêtes which were to follow the arrival of the Princess of Wales. My brother and sister had promised to remain at Spetchingley some weeks longer ; and I experienced grievous symptoms of advancing years in reviewing a circle so broken by the encroachments of time. Of my former companions, the young and lovely Mrs. Sheridan and her sister Mrs. Tickell were no more. —The Duchess of Portland too was gone ;—Mary Monckton had been some years married to the Earl of Cork, who filled a high command in Ireland ; and there, too, was settled Fitzirnham's friend, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, now the husband of Pamela, the daughter of the Duke of Orleans. The Devonshire House party, recently returned from the Continent, were not yet established in town for the season ; and I felt, as most people feel on returning to a spot after long absence, that things were miserably changed.

How willingly would I have renounced the five thousand a-year and painful reminiscences of Mrs. De Vere, for the fresh, eager feelings of Lizzy Mordaunt, rebelling in her attic in Jermyn Street against the thrift of Lady Carleton and impertinence of Mistress Phillis ! I went to visit them immediately on my arrival. But though the now despotic waiting-woman shouted my name into the ear of the poor infirm creature who sat rolled up by the fireside, the Viscountess looked on, unrecognising, and turned to that better comforter of age,—her snuff-box !—

A few weeks, and things began to brighten. I accompanied Mrs. Mordaunt to the drawing-room to be presented on her departure for Italy ; and soon gathered round me the butterfly-friends of former days ; giddy

girls transformed into sober matrons ; sober matrons into artful chaperons ; artful chaperons into nodding dowagers !—

Meanwhile, the estrangement between the Duchess of Rochester and myself was a source of deep regret to my brother Henry, the invariable advocate of family concord. Neither he nor any other living being was aware of the exact circumstances attending the death of the Duke ; Lord Hugh and myself having judged it essential that family secrets of such moment, should be buried in his grave. Ignorant therefore of my causes of irritation, he insisted that a reconciliation should take place ; and I accordingly accompanied the Mordaunts to a dinner-party at her Grace's residence in Spring Gardens.

It surprised me that a person so influential and self-reliant as the Duchess, should think it worth while to make overtures for the acquaintance of the insignificant Mrs. De Vere ; but with still greater surprise did I observe the advantageous change effected in her manners and appearance. No longer the fluttering affected beauty, —no longer the restless woman trying to conceal her frailties from her husband,—she was mild, well-bred, unpretending. The young Duke remained at Brighton-stone under the care of a private tutor. Her beautiful daughters only were around her, seeming to render her more beautiful.

“ I am most happy in the prospects of my children,” said the Duchess to Henry and myself, conversing with us apart, and recognising, with the tact of a woman of the world, my determination to banish all memory of the past. “ Lady Isabella, who is to be one of the four train-bearers of the Princess of Wales at the approaching ceremony, has the offer of a place as Lady of the Bedchamber ; and Lady Helena has for some months been addressed by the Duke of Sicignano, the Neapolitan ambassador.”

“ I wish her joy !” replied my brother. “ Sicignano is at the head of one of the most illustrious houses in Sicily. But would you consent to marry her to a foreigner ?”

“ I am not disposed,” replied the Duchess, gravely, “ to oppose my daughter's inclinations. It is rather to Isabella's views I hesitate about giving my consent. She is

scarcely nineteen ; and to be enfranchised at that age from a mother's authority without being placed under that of a husband—”

“ And in a court such as that of Carlton House is likely to become,” I involuntarily added.

“ Have you, then, any information respecting the new Princess ?” inquired my aunt.

“ Only that she is giddy and wilful,” said I. “ Sir Brook Boothby, when at Brunswick on his official mission, saw her swallow a billet-doux which the Duchess, her mother, required her to give up.”

“ Her manners are I fear unformed, and her character weak,” observed the Duchess. “ Such a woman is scarcely likely to obtain influence over the Prince of Wales ; though, alas ! as our future queen, she may afford fatal lessons to the country.”

“ To do her justice,” I rejoined, “ no one can better extrinsically become her station in life. I find the great world sadly altered for the worse in its tone of representation. There is less of the swan-like dignity of my own day of hoops and minuets : and Lady Augusta Clavering and Lady Charlotte Campbell, in condemning us to the fashion of short waists, have hazarded the loss of half our triumphs. Scarcely a woman left in London possesses the *grandes manières d'une grande dame*. Lady Sutherland, the Duchess of Devonshire, and Lady Elizabeth Foster, are introducing the *laissez-aller* of the Trianon ; and all these noble emigrants—these Vaudreuil, and Grammonts, and Montmorencys, have infected us with a flightiness of manner foreign to our English nature. A French air sits like affectation upon us.”

A few days more, and our curiosity was gratified. The Princess Caroline, so long delayed, arrived in London, and the marriage was solemnised in the Chapel Royal. It was only natural we should beset Isabella de Vere with inquiries, on her return from the ceremony.

“ In the first place—the bride !” inquired Mrs. Mordaunt.

“ The Princess of Wales was attired in a white satin train and diamond coronet, and led to the altar by the young Duke of Clarence.”

"So much, my dear, the Court Circular informed us!" interrupted Clara. "But is she pretty,—is she dignified?"

"Pretty enough. Her manners are those of a person over-anxious to please. She talks and laughs too much. His Royal Highness seems in pain for her."

"And the King?"

"His Majesty appears to see in his daughter-in-law only the daughter of his sister."

"But how will the Queen, so rigid an upholder of propriety, like this laughing, talking lady?" inquired Lady Ailesfort. "Several of the household who went to meet her at Greenwich, are whispering that, while changing her dress at Sir Hugh Palliser's, she conducted herself like a giddy school-girl."

"Poor Princess of Wales!" ejaculated my sister-in-law. "I see clearly how it will be with her. We English are the most prejudiced people on earth. All that differs from our experience in foreign customs, puts our delicacy to the blush; and everything passes for vulgar that is not regulated by the standard of St. James's. Here is a simple, cordial-hearted German girl, come among us with notions formed upon the model of her father's homely court; who will terrify poor old Lady Charlotte Finch, and Miss Vernon, and Miss Brudenell into fits, by her want of experience in the length and depth of curtseys, and her habit of being glad and sorry according to the dictates of nature!"

"I fear it will prove a bad business altogether," observed my brother, who had joined our conference. "Government has broken faith with his Royal Highness respecting the payment of his debts, by which he was bribed into wedlock; and Ministers, by proposing, as 'A new way to pay Old Debts,' the approbation of the increased income voted on his marriage, will reduce the Heir-Apparent to beggarly expedients, necessitating further embarrassments."

"Never mind the Prince—his Royal Highness is strong enough to take care of himself!" said Clara, laughing. "My compassion is enlisted in the cause of the poor

Princess, who has to contend against an old mistress and a world of etiquettes."

And we were all the more eager to second her sympathy as Lady Isabella de Vere had already entered upon her duties as Lady in Waiting.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AMONG the most clamorous against the parsimony exercised by the Pitt administration in relieving the difficulties of the Heir-Apparent, was my cousin Lord Rawborne; who, having advanced to him, on bond, considerable sums of money, felt profoundly interested in the distresses of his Royal Highness.

Susceptible of only two predilections,—love of lucre and love of horseflesh,—the Earl of Rawborne was detested at Newmarket, as a mule, bred between Scotsman and Jewess; who resorted to the turf as the only speculation in which a nobleman can engage without forfeiture of caste. But as the propensity for field-sports forms at least a manly weakness, his lordship's addiction to the racing-stable came to be accounted a virtue, compared with his avarice. Even with his borough-interest, Lord Rawborne dealt like a broker; nor was he ever known to solicit Government for friend or kinsman, lest the concession should be placed to his account in the balance-sheet of parliamentary profit.

In vain did Henry Mordaunt represent to him that his brother Algernon ought to be invited from Italy, to occupy one of the family-seats. Lord Rawborne was inflexible. "His brother," he said, "was an oddity, who in England would draw upon himself the strictures of society: whereas in Italy, where he chose to reside, his absurdities were forgiven in favour of his scholarship and wealth."

"So long as Algernon Rawborne can expend a certain number of crowns per annum, and favour the academies

of Rome with dissertations on Etruscan vases," added Lord Rawborne, "the Italians will vote him to have the soundest of heads; whereas London might sentence him to salt-bathing and Dr. Willis."

"Inquire of your cousin Lady Craven," replied Henry with indignation, "whether she did not find your brother revered as a benefactor and friend, rather than flattered as a *dilettante*. His hospitality, it is true, is at the disposal of travelling artists, rather than of lordlings and their bear-leaders. But all Florence can attest—"

"I require no attestation," said Lord Rawborne coldly. "Algernon has chosen his own line across country. He is now, I am told, a sort of ultramontane Horace Walpole,—devoted to nightingales, dowagers, and Dresden china; and an old bachelor, my dear Henry, is an excellent adjunct to any family, to hoard up stores for the preservation from the almshouse of its prodigal members. Look at Lord Hugh de Vere,—who mouldered through life in single blessedness, in order to bequeath a fortune to the widow of an illegitimate nephew!"—

"But you are yourself a bachelor, Rawborne; and *one* is enough in a family," replied my brother, not deigning to notice the taunt;—"unless indeed you intend your race to become extinct, and its name forgotten."

"It will survive in the immortal pages of the Racing Calendar!" sneered Lord Rawborne. "But, in all cousinly confidence, know that I am waiting till Lady Adeline de Vere shall be a year or two older; when I may present you with a Countess without going out of the family."

"But why not Isabella or Helena?" said Harry.

"Sicignano was beforehand with me with Helena; and Isabella's affections are pledged to Lord Addenbrooke, the only son of the Marquess of Kincardine, governor-general of India."

"And he will have a charming little wife!" cried Henry. "Of the beauties I have seen since my return from Italy, Lady Isabella strikes me as the most captivating." And the first time we met, Henry related to me enough of his conversation with Lord Rawborne, to call forth my anxieties for Isabella.

“ Do not be angry with me,” whispered the dear girl, when, soon afterwards, I taxed her with reserve. “ A strong attachment indeed exists between Lord Addenbrooke and myself ; and I have a hundred times wished to consult the kind friend to whom my poor uncle Hugh advised me to refer in all matters of difficulty. But we have not yet spoken to mamma ; and I should be unfathomable in confiding to another what I have not submitted to her opinion.”

“ But why hesitate ?—The match is unexceptionable.”

“ Lord Addenbrooke wrote by the last fleet to India for his father’s sanction, previous to laying his addresses before my mother. Five months must elapse before we obtain an answer. But it will be more respectful to wait for permission from Lord and Lady Kincardine, before the subject is openly agitated.”

“ What objections can possibly arise ?—You are equally assorted in age, birth, fortune.”

“ Nor does Addenbrooke apprehend opposition. He is an only son. His family are anxious for his early marriage. Everything is in our favour. But Lord and Lady Kincardine are people of the old school, who entertain the most rigid notions of filial submission. As a boy, Addenbrooke was never suffered to enter their presence without an obeisance ; and it is not likely that half-a-dozen years of vice-royalty should have moderated their self-importance. It is but a small sacrifice on our part, to suppress our engagement till an authorisation arrives in form.”

“ Meanwhile, my dear girl, lose no time in relating to the Duchess every word you have told to *me*. Lord Addenbrooke’s attentions have been noticed ; and it might produce an unpleasant feeling between you were she to learn from others what she has a right to hear from her daughter.”

“ I believe you are right,” replied Lady Isabella. “ But I own I feel a degree of unaccountable awe in my mother’s presence. As children, we were not brought up in habits of familiarity with *her* as with my poor father. I was always more intimate with good old nurse Feltham and the governess, than with mamma. And then, so

positive and arbitrary as she is, were she once to make up her mind against Addenbrooke, not all the powers of earth would induce her to relent. Indeed, indeed, I am afraid to introduce the subject to her!"

"I *might* say to you—'A lady of the Bedchamber, and afraid?'—But I *will* say that you are past the age for such weakness."

"Well, well, dear Mrs. De Vere, I *will* speak to her. Let me only first consult Lord Addenbrooke. I wish I had opened my heart to you before. Addenbrooke was very anxious I should decline this appointment at Carlton House. But I had no excuse to offer to mamma, nor he any for interfering."

"And *why* did he wish you to decline it?"

"The Kincardines, as great favourites at Windsor, and violent Tories, may entertain a prejudice—may possibly fancy—may, in short," said Isabella,—checking herself, from the difficulty of expressing before Fitzirnham's widow Lord Addenbrooke's detestation of the *clique* of Carlton House,—"he does not wish his future wife to assume so ostensible a situation."

The following night, I had the satisfaction to learn from Clara Mordaunt, who had accompanied the Duchess to Westminster Hall to be present on the great public occasion of delivering judgment on Hastings, that Isabella had whispered her a message for me, apprising me of the good success of my advice. At this trial, I had not found courage to be present. The King's illness and other political causes had protracted judgment for a period of eight years; increasing the expenses of the East-India Company in the defence of their servant, to a sum of seventy thousand pounds. But even this lapse of time had not sufficed to disconnect in my mind the memory of my husband from those hateful affairs of India, which had proved the means of hastening his end.

"And was the Duchess in good spirits?" I inquired of my sister-in-law, when she delivered Isabella's message.

"I never saw her so charming," was Clara's reply. "And she had reason to be proud;—for every eye was upon her and her two daughters,—the three most striking figures in the hall. William Spencer has lately written

some verses about them, which render them objects of general notice; and beautiful as we thought Isabella in her bride's-maid's dress, she looked far lovelier to-day in Westminster Hall."

So, too, said the public journals. All London seemed occupied with the surpassing beauty of the Ladies De Vere. Their portraits, (the last work finished by Sir Joshua,) attracted admiring crowds to the Royal Academy; and when the Duchess opened her house with a gala in honour of the marriage of the Prince of Wales, the popularity of the De Vere family was at its zenith.

On that auspicious evening, Isabella presented Lord Addenbrooke to me, and Helena her Sicilian duke; the former, an intelligent, manly young Scotsman,—the latter, all that youthful poets dream of in the hero of a romance. Radiant with youth, prosperity, and beauty,—happy in themselves, each other, and the world,—the two sisters seemed to have reached their highest culmination; and, painfully versed in the evanescent nature of worldly pleasures, I could not help whispering to myself, "Heaven send that their joy be permanent!—After the brightest day—*midnight*."

"How rejoiced I am," observed my brother Henry, who was on the eve of his departure for Turin, "to leave you all thus gay, and thus prosperous! I scarcely know which to regard as happiest among my sisters,—Jane, Helen, or yourself. After all the troubles of our family, what a rainbow has graced the cessation of the storm!—Look at the Duchess, whose rewards are so much beyond her merits; and who, at one time, stood on the brink of so frightful a precipice:—see how Fortune has smiled even upon *her*! Two of her girls about to form such noble establishments; while Lady Pembury's death enables her to gratify the first affections of her heart."

"Is Lady Pembury *dead*?" I murmured, as though it were necessary to *whisper* that name under the roof of the Duchess of Rochester.

"How dearly must you love your friends, Lizzy, since they slip out of the world without your knowledge! But I forgot.—She was not *your* friend—she was—"

"Fitzirnham's!—Say on!" cried I, perceiving that my

brother hesitated. "Surely even jealousy must find rest in the grave!"

"Jealousy?" retorted Henry, with a smile. "You never could have found it in your heart to become jealous of 'poor Lady Pembury?'"

"De Vere had a sincere attachment for her—"

"A sincere *friendship*!—But had he entertained one grain of affection for his father's ward, mere pride would not have induced him, as it did, to refuse her hand."

"Do you mean that the hand of Lady Pembury was actually *rejected* by my husband?"

"You must surely have heard that old Fitzirnham left no means untried to throw his elder son into the society of the heiress of whom he was guardian? But the young lady having avowed her preference for De Vere, the young gentleman obtained leave from his father to proceed to the Continent; and did not return to England till the mortified girl had given her hand to Lord Pembury, who, on *his* side, was driven into the match by the opposition of his parents to his alliance with Lady Harriet Rawborne.

"What a system, and what results!" cried I. And as I involuntarily glanced towards the Duchess, I noticed a handsome young man in assiduous attendance upon her.

"Who is he?" I demanded of my brother.

"No less a person," he replied, "than the young Marquis of Mount Hardington, with a princely fortune, and the four finest seats in Great Britain. But though I look upon the Duchess as the luckiest of her sex, she can scarcely have made a conquest of the Alcibiades of the peerage. The utmost force of his imagination will not remove the fifteen years between them, and I should lose my respect for her sagacity, did I imagine that Pembury would be distanced by this handsome boy."

"He is, indeed, singularly good-looking."

"By the way, Lizzy, how comes it *you* have let such a prize escape you?"

"If there be fifteen years between him and my aunt, there must be five between him and myself. At thirty I am not likely to attract a rich marquess of five-and-twenty."

At that moment, the Duke of Sicignano approached to explain a commission which Henry had undertaken for

him in Italy ; the transport of some Cape plants, to his sister, the Princess Colonna.

“ You will see my family in the course of the autumn,” said the Duke. “ The Duchess and Leonora are about to visit my sister at Turin. They will overwhelm you with questions ; for my poor mother loves me as most mothers love an only son. Let me only warn you against betraying my secret to them ; or the rival volcanoes of our two Sicilies are mild types of their indignation.”

“ Not tell them that you have secured the hand of one of the most charming girls in England ?” cried Henry. “ It will require some self-denial not to convey such agreeable intelligence.”

“ Not agreeable to Leonora,” rejoined the Duke.— “ Before I accepted my present appointment, my sister passed nearly a day at my feet imploring me to decline it. You are to know, that I am one of the predestined !— More than a century ago, some Cagliostro of the day predicted at Palermo, that the last heir of the house of Sicignano was to die in a far island of the West ; and my father’s Abruzzian vassals having chosen at my birth to have my nativity cast by their mountain seers,—my unfortunate horoscope set forth that I was to die a violent death, and be the last Duke of Sicignano. Thereby, indeed, hangs a tale, which they will tell you in Italy ; and between these omens and her own presentiments, my dear gentle Leonora would not hear of my accepting a mission to any ‘island in the West.’ Were she to learn that my affections are anchored here for life, she and the Duchess would fly to the feet of the King of Naples, and implore my recall. May I therefore entreat one of my earliest English friends, to refrain in Italy from all premature allusion to my present prospects ?”

“ Rely upon my prudence !” said Henry, accepting his offered hand. “ And should the news of your attachment otherwise transpire, I will do my utmost to persuade the Duchess of Sicignano that Vere Court, where Helena was born, stands in Kentucky !”

CHAPTER XXXII.

I, too, had my commissions for Italy; but I wanted courage to confide them to Clara or my brother. I longed to expostulate with Algernon on the waywardness of his proceedings; and remonstrate against his acclimatising himself permanently in a foreign country.

But I felt conscious of the interpretation such a message might bear. I,—Mrs. De Vere,—rich and independent, might be accused of having summoned to my feet the rejected lover of poor Lizzy Mordaunt.

I sometimes wished that Henry and Clara had invited me to accompany them. But they thought me wedded to Penderels,—calm, elegant, grassy Penderels, with its tranquil lawns and sunny slopes.—For the last five years, however, I had scarcely quitted the place; and every tree,—shrub,—glade,—vista,—was familiar to my eyes, even to satiety.

It was toward the latter end of May that Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt and their eldest boy took leave of us. On the day following, a brilliant ball was given by Lady Jersey to the Princess of Wales; which, considering the relative position of the parties, called forth universal disapprobation.

The very newspapers were unsparing in their comments; till the royal bride, imperfectly as she was skilled in the English language, was induced to make inquiries and extend her observations; and when all became manifest, appealed to the Prince:—insisting on the dismissal of her Lady of the Bedchamber!

On the 4th of June, I was waiting for Madame Le Brun to send home my court-dress, preparatory to the drawing-room, when, to my surprise, the Duchess of Rochester, the renewal of whose acquaintance I had never encouraged to intimacy, made her appearance in Cumberland Place in a morning-dress, but with her feathers and lappets prepared for court.

"I am come to consult you, my dear Mrs. De Vere, as one of the truest well-wishers of my girls," said she, "on the strange dilemma in which we find ourselves. Half an hour ago, the Princess of Wales refused to let Lady Jersey enter her carriage to go to court; and has proceeded to the Queen's House without her!—Isabella, who was to follow in the second carriage, instantly despatched a note to apprise me of what had occurred, and ask my instructions. I confess I am irresolute what part to take."

"The part, I conclude, most friendly to the Prince," said I coldly; "as it was at his Royal Highness's entreaty your Grace permitted Lady Isabella to enter the household."

"Certainly. And I was in hopes his Royal Highness would guard against any public rupture. However, the Princess of Wales has now thrown down the gauntlet, and *some* person must take it up. It is not for me to consult my predilections where the interests of my children are concerned. Tell me, therefore, dear Mrs. De Vere, on which side will it be most advantageous to Isabella to enrol myself? The Princess is likely to give an heir to the throne, under which circumstances, the King *cannot* withhold his interference. Had I been aware, at the time, of Isabella's engagement to Lord Addenbrooke, I would never have consented to her accepting the place; and it strikes me that the event of this morning, and the rupture by which it must be followed, present a desirable opportunity for getting out of the scrape."

"But should Lady Isabella know more than we do of the merits of the case," said I, "and, considering the Princess in the light of an injured person, desire to retain her post?"

"I should be much surprised were a daughter of mine to form a judgment on such a subject, in opposition to my own! I shall meet her at court, and take an opportunity to give her my opinion respecting those she is to hold," said the Duchess, rising hurriedly to take leave, when she found it impossible to wring from me a decisive sentence. She had been in hopes I should enable her to say, "Mrs. De Vere, (whom poor, dear Lord John was so anxious I

should consult in all matters regarding the welfare of the girls,) persuaded me it was the duty of Isabella to resign her office!"

Next day all London was busy with the catastrophe.—At the drawing-room, nothing had generally transpired, save among the two or three to whom the Duchess of Rochester whispered the secret. But neither resignation nor dismissal authorised any active reprisal on the part of her Grace; and to defy the scrutiny of the public, which was beginning to deal somewhat unceremoniously with the chief actors of the drama, the Royal household proceeded from Carlton House to Brighton.

The Stadholder, driven from his States, was just then the invited guest of the Prince; and instead of the flow of wit and display of beauty which, in former years graced, under the easy, elegant sway of the lady-like Mrs. Fitzherbert, the society of his Royal Highness, there was the ill-assorted wrangling couple, who could scarcely keep up in public the farce of conjugal decorum; and the ponderous Dutch prince, whose audible snoring kept tune to the orchestra on every occasion of festivity. Sheridan, readmitted, on this occasion, to the favour of the Prince, (himself the bridegroom of a second wife,) had need of some skill in courtiership to disguise his amazement at the falling-off of the *dramatis personæ* of the Royal comedy.

Meanwhile, Lord Rawborne having put forward his pretensions to become the husband of Lady Adeline De Vere, I considered it my duty to the memory of her uncle to surmount my aversion, and invite him to my house. Under any other circumstances, I should have refrained; in the twofold apprehension that he might suspect me of views upon his coronet, or that my own handsome fortune might draw his speculations towards myself. But I now frequently numbered him among my dinner-guests; and it was from him I learnt the opinions and projects of the Duchess; with whom, as head of her family, and in some sort her pupil, Lord Rawborne had always been a favourite.

“Will the Duchess visit Brighton this summer?” I inquired, one night, when he gave me his arm in a party I had made with the Townshends to Vauxhall.

“She is to pass the season at Vere Court, and have the Duke there for his holidays,” replied he. “After this year, the Duchess, having only the two younger girls on her hands, will be able to travel; and after her marriage, she will probably be glad to get away from home.”

“Her *marriage!*”—cried I, in amazement. “Is the Duchess of Rochester going to marry again?”

“*All* fair widows are going to marry again!” replied Lord Rawborne, affecting a tone of gallantry. “With respect to the Duchess, you know as much of her intentions as I do. Have you not observed in her lately a popularity-seeking tone of mildness and depreciation, like that of a person on the eve of taking an important step, and canvassing for indulgence?”

“Is *that* your only motive for imagining that the Duchess is going to be married? And, whenever I am less a termagant than usual, do I incur a similar inference?” cried I, amused at his interpretation.

“Exactly!—At this very moment, your tone of saucy defiance convinces me that you have no piece of folly in immediate prospect. With respect to the Duchess of Rochester, as Pembury is now a widower, and she a widow, I cannot imagine that anything will prevent them from fulfilling the dearest wish of their hearts for the last twenty years.”

“It is Lord Pembury, then, and not, as I had almost begun to fancy, Lord Mount Hardington, who is to be the happy man?”

“Of what are you dreaming?—Mount Hardington is desperately in love with Helena.”

“And Helena engaged to marry the Duke of Sicignano!”—

“By no means ‘engaged.’ The Duchess would not have disliked to see her figure as Neapolitan ambassadress. But what is that to an English peerage? Mount Hardington is the great match of the day, and a very fine fellow, besides. He bagged four hundred and twenty brace in the first five days’ grouse-shooting, last August; and his stud is the most complete thing in England.”

“And on such temptations, you think Lady Helena will change her mind?”

“Few women, whether for their daughters or themselves, would find courage to refuse Mount-Hardington.”

“And my niece will be one of the few! With respect to the Duchess and Lord Pembury, their marriage would be an act of atonement.”

“An act of execrable folly!”—exclaimed Lord Rawborne.—“Both are happy, rich, and independent. Each is connected with the most disagreeable recollections of the other. The match would only serve to refresh the memory of society. Depend on it, they are much better as they are.”

Unable to coincide with the feelings of Lord Rawborne, I declined argument and kept my opinion. To me, it appeared essential that Lord Pembury should prevent any other man from becoming the father of his son. But the more I ruminated on this painful subject, the more I marvelled at the triumph crowning, even in the most minute particulars, the desires of the Duchess of Rochester. Such a wife,—such a mother as she had been,—unprincipled, haughty, reckless, godless;—outraging every duty of her sex and position!—The lowest of her handmaidens might have been committed to Bridewell for offences such as hers,—the highest in the land had undergone the highest sentence of condemnation, on grounds less valid. A moment had been when disgrace impended over her head as by a single hair. Yet she had escaped,—escaped blameless,—escaped with triumph!—Every advantage was concentrated in her position which the partiality of the world could bestow. Her daughters had only to appear in society, to be sued for by honourable men. She was in favour at Carlton House, and yet uncompromised at Court. Those who stood in her way, seemed to fall and die at the unexpressed wish of her heart. Fitzirnham, the only man cognisant of her treachery, was in his grave.—Lady Pembury was no more.—Even Algernon, with whom it might have been vexatious to her to come in contact, had banished himself to a foreign country as if to avoid giving her pain.

Was not this success?—Was not this triumph?—Was not this discouragement to such as walk the world humbly, in the paths of rectitude and virtue?—I began

to fancy it was written that the ungodly should alway prevail!

On this discovery of the Duchess's projects concerning Lord Mount Hardington, however, I felt it a duty to the memory of Lord Hugh de Vere to keep my eye on the proceedings of her Grace. I invited her accordingly to Penderels, and accepted her invitation, repeatedly declined, to Vere Court. The girls were enchanted at the concession. To both these parties, Lord Addenbrooke was to belong ; and, as the Duchess had probably received no definite proposals from Lord Mount Hardington, she thought proper to continue her courtesies towards the Duke of Sicignano ; from whom, having engaged him to visit Vere Court in the autumn, it was now clearly impossible to withdraw the invitation.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HERTFORDSHIRE has always been a gay, sociable county ;—its lords and ladies being relieved from their farthingales and coats of mail by that close vicinity to the metropolis, which insures general civilisation in place of autocratic distinction. Penderels is one of its most favoured spots ; situated in a grassy glade between Welwyn and Wade's Mill, and within easy reach of Hatfield. Archery was the rage. We had our Toxophilite meetings,—our Hoo races,—our Wheathampstead cricket-matches ;—while Brocket Hall and Panshanger contributed their gay hosts of London visitors to the enlivenment of our sober country neighbourhood.

By these gaieties, the Duchess of Rochester consoled herself for the fortnight her line of policy compelled her to dedicate to the representative of Lord Hugh de Vere. Charles Fox happened to be on a visit to the Melbournes ; his powers of enlivening the monotony of lordly life, a thousand-fold increased by his estrangement from the

jarring world of politics. Disappointments of a public, and vexations of a private nature, had sobered, without embittering his character; and to a heart warm as ever for his friends, and a mind overflowing with the fruits of philosophic culture, he united a sarcastic playfulness of speech,—a polish derived from the hard friction of the world,—imparting a yet more sparkling brilliancy to the diamond of pure water.

“Have you news from Italy?” inquired the Duchess of me, one morning, in a careless tone, as we were sauntering together on the lawn of Penderels, after a drive she had taken alone in her phaeton to Panshanger; while I was introducing the girls and Lord Addenbrooke to the beautiful spring and shrubberies at Woolmers.

“I heard from Clara a fortnight ago.—Of Henry, I exact little as a correspondent. His time is engrossed by the cares of diplomatic life.”

“I did not allude to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Mordaunt.”

“Alfred’s ship is not in the Mediterranean squadron. My brother is stationed in the East Indies.”

“Yes,—I recollect!—But *I* alluded to my nephew Algernon.”

“Many years have elapsed since I had any intercourse with Mr. Rawborne.”

“Not since your marriage!” observed the Duchess, with a smile almost sarcastic. “Mrs. De Vere has not lost the little touch of prudery that distinguished Lizzy Mordaunt.”

“I am glad to see you smile again.—I was almost afraid some mischief might have befallen poor Algernon,” said I, in a reproachful tone.

“No *mischief*,—according to *my* idea of the word. He is only desperately in love. Allow that, after ten years’ constancy, it is almost time!”

“Indeed I do!” replied I,—trying to speak in a cheerful tone. “But how has the news reached England? By the telegraph, I conclude, as Mr. Rawborne’s political friends are at the Admiralty.”

“No! the report came in a letter to Panshanger, while I was there this morning. The ‘*bella e gloriosa donna*’ is a certain fair Countess of the Visconti family, a

near relative of Sicignano, who arrived last year as a bride at Venice ; and selected the handsome Englishman to be her *cavaliere servente*."

" Is that all ?—To call her carriage, mill her chocolate, cool her *sorbetti*, air her lap-dog, and draw and undraw the curtains of her opera-box !—Such, I believe, is the extent of an Italian *liaison*!" said I,—" the last thing in the world likely to provoke my jealousy."

" *Jealousy* ?" ejaculated the Duchess, affecting to stop short, and regard me with surprise.—" You do not actually mean to say, dear Mrs. De Vere, that you feel jealous of a man whom you have frowned upon any time these ten years ; and who need only be summoned by a word to fly to your feet ?"

" Forsaking even those of Countess Visconti ?"

" I had forgotten the Visconti ; which is more than Algernon is likely to do,—at present. Lord Cowper's letter from Florence, stated that poor Rawborne played the part of *patito* with the most infatuated patience."

" Algernon's heart must be somewhat green for its age, to be *infatuated* about even a Milanese Countess. *Mine* has long been turned to clay. I could as easily fall in love, as resume my bib and tucker."

" I would no more proclaim the impossibility of falling in love than of catching the small-pox," said the Duchess ; " for neither disorder spares sex or age. Dear old Madame du Deffand, a miracle of wit and good sense, was as school-girlishly in love at eighty with my friend Horace Walpole, as Algernon with Madame de Visconti. And have we not all seen poor dear Mrs. Montagu sighing like a gray turtle-dove for Lord Lyttelton ; and the antiquated Duchesse de Piennes forced to confess to the Brighton watchmen, that the man getting in at the window was not a housebreaker, but a Romeo ?"

" Illustrious examples, certainly, to smooth my way to folly," said I. " But I must be permitted to refrain."

It luckily occurred to me that my remarks might seem to convey censure upon her own projected marriage with Lord Pembury ; and Lady Helena approaching us at the moment, I turned the conversation to Woolmers and the Colne.

Algernon, then, was lost to me ;—lost, at the moment I was beginning to discover the vast happiness that would be added to my life by a renewal of our friendship ! The position in which he stood towards me as a benefactor, had alone produced my original insensibility. I was now his superior in fortune, and above all suspicion of interested motives in the avowal of my affection. No companion suited me half so well. To none other could I confide my feelings,—my regrets ;—or rather, to none other was it unnecessary to confide them,—since he was familiar with every detail of my life and secret of my heart. It has been said that the long constancy of Pope to Martha Blount consisted in a similar coincidence ; that “the mind of each was reflected on the mind of the other.”

I now admitted that it was to Algernon’s eventual return to England I had been looking, to perfect my domestic happiness ; to direct my opinions and indicate the duties of my station. The domestic happiness of Jane and Helen served only to apprise me of the imperfect nature of my own.

And now, all was over ! I began to rejoice that the pénance-visit of the Duchess to Penderels was nearly at an end. I was eager to be alone with my vexations ; and still more eager for the appointed period of meeting Sicignano at Vere Court. The Duke was not of our Hertfordshire party. Desirous, like most young foreigners, to acquaint himself with the sporting life of England, he had accompanied Lord Rawborne to the Moors ; and they were to meet us in Lancashire the first week in September. Thither, the Duchess and her daughter preceded us ; with the exception of Isabella, who was discharging her duties at the Pavilion.

I was to visit Spetchingley on my way to Vere Court ; and before leaving home, drove over one morning to Brocket. Its gay guests were gone on a fishing excursion to Luton Park. But my coachman having insisted on resting his horses, I had the good fortune to find in the library Mr. Fox, who was suffering from a fit of the gout ; and Pen Lamb, who had remained behind at Brocket, to keep company with the invalid.

“A thousand thanks for your charity to a sick hermit,”

cried he. " You enable me to be peremptory with my young friend, who has been losing his summer's day in order to lend a little sunshine to mine. In vain have I been assuring poor Pen that I had business in hand; and that, as 'the labour we delight in physics pain,' I could afford to pass the day alone. He insists that I am at Brocket to play, not work; that I left St. Anne's Hill expressly for the benefit of a holiday. But now you are come, both may yield with a good grace. *He* has every excuse for going;—I, every consolation in staying."

Pen Lamb quitted us accordingly, to finish letters for his father for the post; and to find myself sitting alone with Fox in the large cool library, carried me back painfully to days of yore. A tone of conversation, light without levity, philosophical without pretension, classical without pedantry, but displaying by fits and starts that "scholar's melancholy" which descends with gray hairs upon middle age, deeply affected me. I remembered Charles James Fox, when, twelve years before, at four-and-thirty, life seemed opening to him as brilliantly, *more* brilliantly, than to those of any man of his day. But now, all was dark. The future afforded him no promise,—the present, little pleasure. Nor were his own reflections much more cheering than mine.

" You bring back old times sadly to my mind, dear Mrs. De Vere," said he, gazing upon me as I sat beside him on the sofa. " Instead of the meridian brightness of girlhood I once saw radiant in your face, I find the mild sweetness of evening. For my part," continued he, with one of his benignant smiles, " I find the leaves dropping from my tree of life, and leaving it, like Timon's—

Bare to every storm that blows!"

" After a certain period of human life," said I, " there is consolation in finding one's leaves growing yellow with those of the rest of the grove. The melancholy cypress or yew that survives, evergreen, in a cemetery, has but a gloomy triumph."

" And I, not fifty years old, am beginning to apprehend the fate of the cypress! The death of your husband left a sad gap in my existence. The days of Burke and

Fitzpatrick are numbered.—The Prince," said he, trying to recover his gaiety, "is morally extinct. Not a particle of his idiosyncrasy is identical with the Prince of other days."

"With Sir Sidney for his Bayard, and John Doyle for his George Selwyn, what can you expect?"

"We will not trouble ourselves with such small deer," continued Fox, with a significant smile. "But I regret that the daughter of my poor dear friend, Lord John, should be entangled in so dangerous a labyrinth."

"Lady Isabella will have a pretext for resigning, on her marriage with Lord Addenbrooke," said I.

"Lord Addenbrooke?—Aha!—And what do the Kincardines say to their son-and-heir establishing himself in the family of the Duchess of Rochester?"

"The next fleet will probably bring their consent to the match."

"I am sorry to hear it is still undecided. The Kincardines are people who abide by the rubric. You might raise two marble effigies of some Baron and Baroness of the Middle-ages off a tomb in Westminster Abbey, and infuse more humanity into them than is exhibited by Kincardine and his wife in their warmest moments. Their piety is not love of God, but fear of the Devil;—their loyalty not devotion to the King, but contempt of the People. Lord Kincardine would have made a capital Archbishop.—He missed his vocation in becoming Governor-General."

"But you do not imagine that he will oppose the wishes of Lord Addenbrooke?"

"Imagine?—Yes! I *do* imagine that nothing is more likely than for him to object to a connection with the Duchess. But it is a mere act of imagination. I have no grounds for the belief. And now tell me something of my friend Rawborne?"

"He is on the Moors, as usual at this season."

"Returned to England?"—

"Ah! you are speaking of my cousin Algernon?"

"Of whom else?—You don't suppose I have a sentiment in common with that animated betting-book, his brother? Smile and welcome! I plead guilty to love of play, as one of the excitements of conventional life. But

I detest your sportsman, trafficking in horseflesh, as an epicure abhors a glutton."

"There is one sentiment you would not blush to entertain in common with him," said I. "Lord Rawborne is in love with one of the Duchess's charming daughters."

"And she is going to sacrifice her girl to the monster?"

"She is going to make her Countess of Rawborne. Lady Adeline is scarcely seventeen,—has seen nothing of the world,—her cousin is the only man with whom she is much acquainted, and she marries him without repugnance."

"Without repugnance!"—The pet sophism of the French!—The fine-lady emigrants assure me, when I attack their *mariages de convenance*, that they marry and make marry 'without repugnance!' What a system to pursue in the creation of a tie which extends beyond the limits of the grave!—The connection which of all others demands sympathy of soul, thought, feeling, action, principle!"

"You speak with unction!"

"I speak out of the abundance of my heart. I speak when I feel—or am silent. On this point I feel deeply. I have sanctioned matches in my own family, and perhaps demanded sanction, for which this unanimity of heart and soul affords the sole apology. And bear in mind, dear Madam,—take it, my dear Mrs. De Vere, from the lips of a man of nearly half-a-century's experience,—that such a marriage is the 'sovereign'st thing on earth,'—a foretaste of Heaven afforded to poor mortals, as bounty-money to enlist for the skies!"

"I will lay your lesson to my heart," said I, with a smile, "for the woman's reason, that your philosophy is confirmed by my personal experience. But you were speaking of my cousin Algernon. You will hear with regret that he has formed a *liaison* likely to detain him in Italy for the remainder of his days."

"That cursed Italy!" cried Fox, referring probably to some animosity of his own. "But be comforted!—In Italy, the English are not long destined to remain. Italy will soon be made the seat of war by the new-fledged republicans of France. In the first place, it affords the only

debateable ground on which they are likely to pluck the wings of the Imperial Eagle. Austria would have little chance in the Milanese, against the champions of liberty; and in the states of Genoa and Venice, the people wait but a signal to rise against their oligarchical task-masters. The French Republic may have been unlucky on the Rhine. Mark my prediction that it will gather laurels on the Po."

"Which you think will drive Algernon from Italy?" said I, referring to what I regarded as the only important effects of such a cause.

"Of course!—When I was there in eighty-eight, I found the population of several states ripe for insurrection. The French Revolution has since sent scouring over Europe a drove of Sampson's foxes, with firebrands at their tails, to let fall a spark wherever the fruits of the earth are dried up and ripe for conflagration. My friend Rawborne, with his aristocratic name and presence, his palace on the Brenta and other patrician foibles, may find Venice too hot to hold him, when its new Council of Ten shall be composed of Cittadino Bruto the butcher, Cittadino Catone the baker, and Cittadino Scævola the steward of maccaroni."

"By these contempts, you second the Duchess of Gordon's retort to Lord Lauderdale," said I. "But no matter!—Since you announce my cousin's return, I applaud your inconsistency."

The Luton party now returning, the conversation became general. A few days afterwards, I was at Spetchingley; where the good Squire and Mrs Mordaunt were installed as if they had never quitted the place. My father had now completed three-score and fifteen years, and, but for the adversity of his latter years, would probably have remained robust as ever. But his day for field-sports was over. His eye brightened indeed when Dick Mordaunt (whom at fifty he regarded as a brisk young fellow) regaled him with the details of a fine run, or a good day's shooting. But his own occupation was to watch the progress of some colts destined for little Harry, whom he invariably designated "young Mordaunt of Spetchingley."—His whole happiness seemed centred in my brother's two boys.

Here then, too, I was supplanted.—Even here, I was but a secondary object.—Aware that his daughter Lizzy was happy in a fine place and fine fortune, my father could not suppose me the least happy of his children, and consequently the most covetous of his tenderness. At length, one day, when I returned from the church, my eyes red, my heart full, with meditating over the grave of my husband,—the old gentleman called me into his library, much as he would have done at fifteen, fifteen years before; and gave me his serious recommendation to marry again!

He cited the comforts of his own domestic life,—the happiness of my brothers and sisters.

“There’s Harry,” said he, “with that good wife of his, who turns pale if he gets a hedge-thorn, out shooting;—such a life of peace and good-will as they lead together, she neither knowing nor caring whether the trade-wind blows round his side the house, or hers: happy and obedient as if she had been some Melton or Leicester miss, whom young Mordaunt of Spetchingley had picked up without a guinea in her pocket!—There’s Jane and her good-man, as quiet and content at their country-place as two field-mice in a furrow, (though I’m told Rothesbury Hall is nothing to mention with Spetchingley,—two turnpike roads and a navigable canal right through the park!) As to Helen,—to be sure, there would be no pardon for her to be otherwise than content, with forty thousand a-year, a fine old castle, a fine young chap of a lord, and two beautiful babes,—all thrown at her head, as one may say, when she had scarcely where to lay it. For *that* luck, Lizzy, she has to thank *you*; and so has her old father—and so he does, (though young Ailesfort is as thorough a tailor on horseback as ever crossed a saddle.) All these children of mine, God be thanked, are as happy couples as may be, and a pattern in their generation. And do you know, Liz, they tell me even my son the Prebendary, (Dick the Demure as you used to call him—you and Harry—Harry and you were always sad madcaps when children; Lady Betty, poor dear woman, used to have many a fright about you!) even Richard is going to take a wife.—Ho! ho! ho!—the eldest daughter of the Bishop of Lichfield: and between you and me, Lizzy, it will be

lucky if the gray mare don't prove the better horse ; for I'm told the bride is as gray as a badger ; fine church interest, fine fortune, fine expectations, and forty-five.—But 'twas of yourself, my dear girl, I wanted to talk to you."

I began to fidget in my chair, and to wish that little Algernon, who had the privilege of his grandfather's room, might break in and interrupt a colloquy which I felt persuaded would lead to the subject of my cousin.

"I don't feel comfortable to see you turned adrift on the wide sea of life, without pilot or convoy, my dear girl," resumed my father. "It would give me satisfaction to find you happily settled, before I go down to the grave ; under the care of some fine manly-hearted fellow, who would keep your property together, and be company for your long winter evenings yonder in Hertfordshire. In short, Lizzy," he continued, "without going out of our own family, I have my eye on one who has loved you like the apple of his eye, for the last twelve years or more ;—who loved you before you ever so much as heard tell of the poor fellow that lies yonder in Spetchingley Church.—Ay, ay !—no wonder you blush to hear of it !"

And my father indulged in a laugh which I thought sadly ill-timed.

"To say truth, my dear, one of the things that reconciled me to the match you chose to make," resumed he, "was that it put an end to his heart-burnings, and settled you at once out of his way. But now, you're independent—a young widow with a fine jointure and a fine woman still,—I see no reason why you should not make up a match with your cousin."

"My cousin, my dear father," said I, "has other engagements."

"I don't believe a word of it ! Because the poor fellow is not sighing and dying at your apron-string, you fancy he must have got another sweetheart. Years ago, Lizzy, when you were single, did he ever make much of a lover in the way of courting ? To be sure, after you went off to London to Lady Carleton, the poor fellow did so mope about the house, going and sitting for hours in the room that used to be yours, that when he started off after you, merely for a glance at the house you lived

in, (for he never screwed up courage for a call,) I told him when he came back, that if times should ever mend with us, he should have my free leave to ask for you, and my blessing into the bargain."

"*Dick Mordaunt?*"—I ejaculated, almost breathless with surprise.

"Yes! Lizzy;—your cousin Dick!" reiterated the old man; "who has been the staff of my old age,—and that is a strong word from one blest with such a son as mine. South wind or north, Dick was always staunch—always ready to come to call. I've known him go without many a thing he wanted, when money grew scarce among us; for his purse was always more mine than his own."

"I am quite sensible, Sir," said I, "of my cousin's great and good qualities. But, not to enter into other objections, the vast difference of age between us—"

"Why, what's a matter of twenty years," interrupted my father, "when it lies on the right side? And where would you find a likelier-looking fellow than Dick, or one who carries his age as well?—Last Whitsuntide, when he was over at Leicester for the 'Sizes, there was Lord Harborough and several of the country gentlemen who've known Dick since they were born, swore he wasn't an hour altered for the last twenty year; and I don't suppose there's a bolder rider in this and the next three counties!"

"I grant it all, my dear father; but—"

"But he is not a maccaroni—not a buck—not a beau—"

"Mr. Fitzirnham was no maccaroni," said I, in an extenuating tone.

"Then I'm afraid, Lizzy, I counted too much on your moderation. I'm afraid you despise the poor fellow for his poverty?"

"So much the contrary, my dear father, that could the sacrifice of a portion of my fortune recompense my cousin for the devotion of his life to our family—"

"No, no, my dear! Dick wants none of your money. 'Tis yourself he has been hankering after, from the day you were ten years old. He used to be so proud of you, Lizzy,—proud even of your pride as Miss Mordaunt of Spetchingley. But he was afraid your sagacity would

find him out, and make a butt of his passion ; and so was always finding fault, to put you on a wrong scent."

"He succeeded. I own I never suspected him."

"May be," interrupted my father, struck with a bright idea—"may be, child, 'tis a lord you are looking for?—May be this grand match of Helen's has put it out of your head that you are but the daughter of a country 'squire?—Ah! Lizzy, Lizzy! there was always a spice of Raw-borne blood in you ; and that was the reason your poor dear mother, rest her soul! loved you better than the rest. Lady Betty couldn't at all times forget she'd walked at the coronation.—*Didn't* she walk? Well, never mind!—She was there as an Earl's daughter ; and for an Earl's daughter, 'tis a hard thing to tumble down into a 'squire's wife.—But the best of wives she was, and best of mothers. And now, what shall I say to poor Dick?"

"Did Mr. Mordaunt commission you, then, to make proposals to me?"

"There or thereabouts."

"I am heartily sorry, Sir, to hear it. I could have wished—"

"Ay, ay! I see how 'tis! Enough said. Well, my dear, I'll soften it to the poor fellow as well as I can. And so, Lizzy, I'll plague you no more about lengthening your stay this time at Spetchingley ; 'twill be only vexatious to both of you.—As you settled it at first, to-morrow, go to Yorkshire—to Lord Fitzwilliam's, isn't it? and then, away to your Duchess-aunt. What chance has a poor Le'stershire fox-hunter among so many high-flyers?"

I threw myself, as in former years, into his arms.

"A Leicestershire fox-hunter is the first object to me in life," cried I, "when I see him in my father. Forgive me, if I have other fancies in a husband."

"You are a dear dutiful child," he replied, laying his hand with much emotion on my head. "Be happy in your own way. No fear but 'tis one that will be a credit to your family."

"Farewell, Lizzy!" he added, on taking leave of me the following day. Next time you visit Spetchingley, ten to one but 'twill be to lay your father's old bones in the grave!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

I PASSED a delightful week at Wentworth House. Lord Fitzwilliam loved me for Fitzirnham's sake, whose unfortunate mother was his distant relation. It was on account of his mother's connections, that Fitzirnham had been brought up among the Whigs. Wentworth afforded a thousand remembrances of his youth; and I was sorry when the day arrived to summon me from the sober dignities of one of the most unostentatiously-aristocratic of English mansions, to the more brilliant, but less genuine hospitality of Vere Court.

It was my first visit to a spot with which I was connected by so many invisible but indissoluble links. As the niece of the Duchess, the widow of Fitzirnham, and the representative of Lord Hugh de Vere, I felt myself to have a triple portion in its destinies; and when my carriage traversed the fine old moated drawbridge, and drew up in the quadrangle of the venerable building exhibiting at all its gables the wyvern volant,—the ancient crest of the house of De Vere,—inexpressible emotions overpowered me.

I had been interrogated by Charles Fox and several other guests at Wentworth House, concerning the character of the young Duke of Rochester; and could only reply, that as he was educated at Brighton, I had not yet seen him; but that, as an object of strong affection to his mother and sisters, I concluded he must be a promising boy.

"The lad is now in his twelfth year," added Mr. Fox on the late occasion: "the Duchess ought to send him to Westminster. All the De Veres are brought up at Westminster; it is time the boy should be there."

I had accordingly determined to seize some moment during my visit to Vere Court, to repeat to the Duchess the counsel of a friend so illustrious. But I found I should have little opportunity for confidential conversa-

tion with her. The house, gigantic as it was, was full of company ;—people returning from the Moors,—from the Lakes,—and idling out their time in Lancashire till Doncaster Races. Every day, we sat down a party of more than thirty to dinner, with a constant change of guests.

Lord Addenbrooke and Lord Mount-Hardington were of the party. There were the Wrottesleys, St. Johns, Sheridan and his bride, the Haggerstons,—most of the persons with whom I was intimately acquainted ; and the day after my own arrival, Lady Isabella, under the guardianship of her faithful nurse Feltham and another upper servant, arrived from Brighton.

“Have you not brought the young Duke with you ?” I inquired when, arm-in-arm with Lady Helena, she ran into my dressing-room. “I understood he was to pass his holidays at Vere Court ?”

The two girls looked at each other,—Lady Helena deeply blushing.

“Have you not already seen my brother ?” demanded Isabella. “He has been here this fortnight.”

“Mamma does not like Henry to leave his suite of rooms, now the house is so full of company,” said Helena, replying to her sister. “I believe she thinks it might distress Mrs. De Vere to see him.”

I looked, as I felt, greatly surprised.

“Surely,” observed Lady Isabella, readily interpreting the expression of my countenance, “you have already heard,—you are aware,—that Henry is——” she hesitated.

“Less forward and intelligent than other boys of his age,” added Lady Helena, firmly. “It is not surprising that, agitated as my poor mother must have been previous to his birth, the child should not be strong in mind or body. At one time, it seemed impossible he should live. But great care and pains have been taken. He is the most affectionate docile creature upon earth ; and often, for weeks together, seems to have the full use of his faculties. He soon relapses, however, poor fellow ; and more than half the year is in a state to be seen only by the members of his family. Mamma fancies sea-air advantageous ; and he has a physician, tutor, and nurse

attached to his Brighton establishment, who never lose sight of him."

"Unfortunate boy!" was my involuntary exclamation.

"Last spring, he became so much stronger and more rational, that she determined he should pass a month, this autumn, at Vere Court; in which I fear she was wrong, as the indispensable precautions have caused his unhappy condition to be far more generally known or suspected, than they ever were before."

"I always fancied *you* perfectly well-informed on the subject," observed Isabella; "and that it was out of delicacy to his state, you forbore to mention Henry's name to us."

Alas! I could not explain to the girls the true motives of my reserve. I could only express my sincere sympathy in the mortification which so great a calamity must entail upon their mother.

She, then, whom in my shortsightedness I had thought too happy for her sins,—she, on whose account I had presumed to arraign the justice of Providence,—was suffering under that heavy dispensation—an idiot child. What thorns must have been wearing into her flesh; what bitter vexations into her heart, when I fancied her proudest and most triumphant.—Alas! in *her* the sentence of Divine wrath was indeed accomplished. The sins of the parents had been visited upon the child.

Had the young Duke of Rochester been deformed, even to the worst extreme of human deformity, no mystery would have been observed concerning his misfortune. The world would have known, and the newspapers have proclaimed, what physicians were consulted, and what means resorted to for his recovery. But mental infirmity is an ailment from the admission of which even the least worldly-minded parent shrinks with anguish. The silence of the Duchess of Rochester proclaimed her fully sensible that the heaviest of inflictions had fallen upon the child of her frailty.

So deeply was I penetrated with the awfulness of this retributive decree, that, when we met at dinner, I could scarcely summon up spirits to answer the lively salutations of the Duke of Sicignano, who was just arrived; or

to admire the brilliant sallies of George Canning, whose acquaintance I had recently made at Devonshire House, and who was now returning with the young couple, Lord and Lady Titchfield, from a tour to the north.

Country-houses, in those times, were not what I have seen them, of late, under the presidency of my grand-nieces. In *my* time, there was none of the listless apathy of modern fashion. Gaiety was volatile, not to say vociferous; for the Duchess of Gordon had brought into vogue the wildest hilarity. Instead of *tableaux* and charades,—Blind-man's-buff and Questions and Commands, filled up many a boisterous evening; coterie more refined than that of her Grace, indeed, had imported from the ill-fated Trianon a taste for *petits-jeux de société*, which, if boasting greater elegance, were neither more intellectual nor more discreet. But what Miss Fanshawe has described as “one eternal cut and shuffle,”—Scotch reels, “Money Musk,” or “Sir Roger de Coverley,”—did honour to our restless activity; while the music-room was supplied by the jiggety-jig of Arne, and the commonplace of Storace. We were beginning to tire of Handel; whose solemn majesty was still the delight of the Windsor Court.

Vere Court was so far superior to many other noble mansions of my contemporaries, as to reject the practical jokes of Gordon Castle or Stowe; nor did the Duchess of Rochester permit her daughters to emulate the private theatricals of Blenheim or Cliefden. Though Jekyll, William Spencer, and Mat Lewis were of our party, I heard no *attempt* at wit;—no “fetching and carrying of bays,”—no *impromptus faits à loisir*. A charming *émigrée*, Madame de Flahault, an especial favourite of Charles Fox, assured me that the wittiest coteries of Paris exhibited nothing more brilliant, easy, and conversational, than the society of the Duchess of Rochester.

During the lifetime of the third Duke, father to Lord John, Horace Walpole having twice visited Vere Court in a rhapsody of enthusiasm, had been at the trouble of writing out a *catalogue raisonné* of its fine collections, which was afterwards printed at Strawberry Hill; Fitzpatrick—or, I think it was General Burgoyne—having

protested that the housekeeper was in the habit of transforming certain pictures into "Courageous's my Tony," and "Dishum's Dammee."

But nothing had since been changed in the house. The Duchess had so far reformed her taste since she first complained of the mildew of age encrusting the possessions of the De Veres, as to have restored the place strictly in accordance with its original character. The state-rooms and galleries had been simply cleaned, and the doors and windows placed in sound condition. The private wing, indeed, was submitted to the laws of modern luxury. But it was to the state-rooms we were compelled to have recourse for our evenings' amusements, during the stay of so large a party. A fine vaulted music-room, the picture gallery, and state drawing-room, were every night brilliantly lighted up; in spite of which, the heavy hangings of crimson velvet, the painted ceilings and oaken pannelling, imparted a gloomy character to the place.

"There is something at Vere Court that throws a weight upon my spirits," said Lady Isabella to Lord Addenbrooke, one Sunday night when the organist and sacred music had been called for by the Duchess, in compliment to one or two of her more serious guests. "One cannot take a walk here without crossing the drawbridge; or arrive in the drawing-room, without traversing that great gulf of a staircase, which seems to belong to a state-prison rather than to a dwelling-house."

"It is because you were not accustomed to the spot in early childhood," said I, to whom her observation was partly addressed.

"True!—Vere Park, where we lived so long and happily, was gay, cheerful, light, airy."

"And then," added Helena, speaking in a whisper, "it is impossible to forget, whenever we pass the chapel, that it contains the remains of my poor dear father."

"I always concluded that the Duke was interred in the parish church, like Lord Hugh at Penderels, among his people and his poor?"

"Our family-vault is under the chapel, just below the De Vere monuments which you may have remarked during prayers."

"Is there one to the memory of the late Duke?"

"No!—It has often struck us with surprise, that mamma never thought of erecting even a tablet!" observed Helena; who, as well as her sisters, remained in ignorance of every detail connected with the death of their father.

Another motive for the expression of care I sometimes saw contract the countenance of the Duchess!—A living and a dead witness of her crime constantly beside her. Her husband's grave—her idiot son—under her roof!

"For my part," interposed William Spencer, who had been enlarging apart, with the Duke di Sicignano, on the original text of Lady Isabella, "I never visit Vere Court without longing to furnish myself beforehand with a ghost-trap. If such a thing as ghost yet linger on English earth, unexorcised by Cavendish or Adam Smith,—by chemistry or political economy,—it must be within the magic square of the moat surrounding us. Spectres, by the way, are apt to be afflicted with hydrophobia; from those of the Styx, modernwards. *I speak avec connaissance de cause.* 'Lenore' is not the only German maiden in whose company I have made ghostly acquaintances; and I suspect the existence of more than one unearthly visitant at Vere Court."

The two simple-hearted girls turned pale; while Mr. Spencer, unheard by either, whispered to me,—'And I suspect the 'beauteous majesty of Denmark' has her own misgivings on this point. The Duchess would go further and fare worse, rather than venture by moonlight on the battlements; and were my friend Pembury to make his appearance here from Ireland, we should probably be startled from our rest at dead of night by a hollow 'Swear!—proceeding from the subterranean justice-room."

I was about to remonstrate against this ill-timed levity, when we were all startled by the sound of a heavy fall; and on starting from our seats, we found extending on the ground, near the door, the insensible form of the Duchess. A few words of the indiscreet conversation I have been describing had reached her ears; and, ere she could quit the room, deprived her of sense and

motion! I was one of those who assisted in raising and bearing her to her chambers. But I fear that during my absence the comments and suppositions of her guests were only too freely indulged.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE following day, the Duchess kept her room, and requested me to do the honours of Vere Court in her place. When I visited her in the course of the afternoon, I observed so strange an alteration in her countenance, that I entreated Lady Isabella to send for advice.

“I have already proposed it,” she replied. “But mamma refuses; and is not a person to bear dictation from her daughters.”

The Duchess was right. The whole College of Physicians could have done nothing for her. Her malady was of the mind; and seemed, during the time she remained confined to her room, hourly to increase. Several of the more formal guests, concluding their presence to be *de trop*, departed without further ceremony; and the Duke of Sicignano, the limit of whose invitation had expired, made an explicit request for the honour of an audience of her Grace.

The young man admitted to me that his object was to demand the hand of Lady Helena; and, at the instance of the girls, I exerted my influence with the Duchess, not only to receive him, but to receive him favourably.

But as I went straight to the point, she answered me with equal frankness, that “nothing would induce her to accept the Neapolitan duke for a son-in-law!” Vainly did I remind her of the declaration made in the spring to Henry and myself, that she would not interfere to prevent any match likely to promote the happiness of her daughter.

“She perfectly remembered the circumstance. But she had since taken counsel from the friends of the late Duke of Rochester; and as the Duke di Sicignano was a

Papist, of whom and of whose family comparatively little was known in England, they saw in the alliance nothing to tempt her to the sacrifice of her daughter's society. Helena was young and inexperienced, and fancied herself attached to a handsome young man, who had been the first to call her an angel. But *she*, as guardian of the girls, was responsible to the world for their welfare, and must look for something more."

To shake her resolution appeared at present impossible ; and I strongly advised the young couple to wait a more propitious moment. Lovers, however, are not to be controlled. Within an hour, the Duke addressed to her Grace a formal letter of proposal, offering her *carte blanche* in the way of settlements and every other arrangement. But his offer was peremptorily, nay haughtily, rejected, in a tone that left no opening for perseverance. All that remained for Sicignano was to order post-horses and depart.

The circumstance most irritating in the affair was, that when *he* departed, Lord Mount-Hardington remained master of the field. Even Lord Addenbrooke, of whom the English suitor was the intimate friend, did not conceal his satisfaction that he was not to have a foreigner for his brother-in-law ; and I observed with pain for my young friend, that all those staying in the house, to whom the despair of the lovers had given a tolerable insight into what was going on, applauded the opposition of the Duchess.—Foreigners were getting out of fashion. As in the case of every extensive emigration, bad had crowded to England with good ; and the respectable were made accountable for the encroachments of swindlers. Sicignano was a foreigner and a Papist—no matter whether from Paris or Palermo.—He *could* not be a desirable match for the daughter of England's premier Duke.

Meanwhile, I had derived some advantage from this unlucky visit of Sicignano, by obtaining the fullest personal details concerning the Countess his kinswoman. But like most inquisitive people, I had procured aliment for my own disquiet. Alidea di Visconti, he informed me, was beautiful, sprightly, and scarcely twenty years of age !—*That* was the thorn that pierced home !—She was

ten years younger than myself; and I, so world-worn,—so haggard in heart,—could fully appreciate the potency of the charm. It is not, as the vulgar would interpret, mere lustre of the eye,—mere bloom of the complexion,—that renders irresistible the charm of youth. It is the warm heart, yet unchilled by the mortifications of life;—the bright soul, still beaming with the unsullied lustre derived from its sacred source. In early life, the spiritual predominates. As we live on and on, clay gains the ascendancy.—We grow material,—we grow mortal. In the society of Alidea, my cousin doubtless found that sanguine confidence,—that elasticity of sense,—which imparts such buoyancy to life;—in all which, my nature was a bankrupt.

He had heard nothing, however, of the intimacy between his fair relation and Algernon. “I must own,” said he, when replying to my interrogatory, “that with us, such *liaisons* are too much a matter of course, for any one to think it worth while to notice it in a letter; unless the lady played traitress, and deserted one *cavaliere* for another.—Still, I never desire to hear of my English friends involving themselves in similar connections. Of all soft slaveries, it is the mildest, and consequently the most permanent.—It is far easier to get rid of a sentiment than a habit.”

“To us,” said I, “the *cavalieri serventi* of Italy appear to hold the place of upper servants. In England, women exercise some influence over manners and morals; but severer bondage, like the usages of feudal times, has fallen into disuse. Our tenderness is of a silent, undemonstrative order; and cicisbeism is no less revolting to our principles, than repugnant to our taste.”

But, however inclined to assert the morality of my countrywomen, I knew Sicignano had seen too much of our higher orders not to be aware that “the lady did profess too much.” The aristocracies of all the civilised countries of Europe exhibit a family-likeness; as the same soil and latitude produce similarity of vegetation. Luxury and idleness will as surely beget licentiousness in the realms of a virtuous Maria Theresa, as in those of a profligate Catherine; and though the moralists of England,

deriving their examples chiefly from the middle classes, whose cares and occupations and protestant rigidity combine to preserve them from excess, assert with justice the purity of our domestic life, Sicignano had seen too many a page of our English peerage defiled with—"which marriage was dissolved by Act of Parliament,"—to be hoodwinked by mere assumption.

The era I have been describing was, in fact, one whose social license rivalled its social brilliancy; and posterity will be required to accept wit, beauty, and magnificence, in atonement for many an outrage on domestic decency, and an utter contempt for the claims of suffering humanity. The reign of Charles II. is read as a brilliant and licentious comedy. The frank gallantry of Henry II., of France, and the regal splendours of Louis le Grand, diffuse a false lustre over their several epochs; and I have sometimes heard regrets expressed by the idle and luxurious, that our utilitarian age had become too practical for the pleasures of life. But had they lived in the days when uproarious mobs surrounded the sovereign whenever he appeared in public, crying aloud for "bread;" and when a hearse was actually driven into the court-yard of St. James's, for purposes of intimidation; had they witnessed, as I did, the disunion of families, the confusion of offspring, the bitterness of remorse connected with the brilliant epoch in question, they would thank their stars for having fallen upon better days.

Among its other disgraces, was the now unconcealed disunion of the Prince and Princess of Wales; and the public exposure of the discords of the Pavilion rendered the position of Lady Isabella almost insupportable.

Again and again, did she intreat permission from the Duchess to send in her resignation.

"Wait a few months," persisted her mother, "and your marriage will afford a pretext. On what plea could we now ground such a proceeding?—Delicacy of health?—Absurd! when their Royal Highnesses have so lately seen you in the full bloom of youth!"—

"I have no wish to disguise my motives."

"Not when your mother will be made accountable for your perversity?"

"You are very earnest, then, dear mamma, that I should remain?" inquired Isabella in a desponding voice.

"I ask it as a *favour*; a strong word for so trifling a sacrifice!—Lord Addenbrooke assures us his father's sanction to your marriage will arrive at Christmas; and before the commencement of the ensuing season, you will have become Countess of Addenbrooke, and bidden adieu to Carlton House. From that period, your movements will be regulated by your husband."

"Do you suppose, then, that the marriage will take place in the course of the winter?" said I, mistrustfully, when Isabella had quitted the room.

"What obstacle should prevent it?—With five daughters, I am naturally anxious that one of them should settle in life, to afford, in case of any mischance to myself, a protectress to the rest. And, were my own wishes consulted, I would willingly see Helena and Adeline married on the same day with their sister."

"Helena?—You have relented then in favour of the Duke of Sicignano?" cried I, with dawning hopes.

"So far from it, that I have conditionally accepted for her the proposals of Lord Mount-Hardington. Adeline will complete her seventeenth year early in February, and a single celebration might solemnise the marriages of the three sisters. There is nothing more insupportable than to have engaged young ladies sighing and sentimentalising about one. You will greatly oblige me, dear Mrs. De Vere, by assisting me to put an end, as early as possible, to this embarrassing position."

My duty to the memory of Lord Hugh was imperative; and I spoke as strongly against Isabella's retention of her place and a precipitate marriage for a child like Adeline, as in favour of poor Sicignano.

But not a syllable did the Duchess deign to reply. She fixed her calm, cold eye upon me for some moments in silence; then, rose and quitted the room; and from that period, the Duchess of Rochester's demeanour became so reserved and distant, that, three days after my fruitless advocacy of the cause of the girls, I found myself and my wounded pride on our way home to Penderels.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

COULD anything have increased the depression of my spirits, on my own account as well as on that of my young cousins, the omens of that dreary autumn were calculated to call forth melancholy forebodings!—Every day produced some public disaster. The coercive measures necessitated by the public insults offered to the King on the day of the opening of Parliament, threw a damp over the political atmosphere; while such was the intemperance of the equinoctial season, that fleets sank upon our coasts; and “high towers and moss-grown steeples” were toppled down in all directions. Loss of life—loss of property—was universal. Every mail brought tidings of national calamity.

The day after my return to Penderels, was signalised by a hurricane unprecedented in England in the memory of man; and the rising of the river Lea occasioned great devastation in my little domain. Several fine old timber-trees adorning the place, were snapt like reeds before the wind.

These portents oppressed my spirits. I had not yet passed a solitary winter at Penderels. The mild intellectual companionship of Lord Hugh had spoiled me for ordinary society. The intelligent, the high-bred, and high-principled, are not easily attainable in a provincial neighbourhood; and my courage failed before the desolate prospect of a lonely winter. A country-life, without so much as a favourite companion with whom one may “sit by the fire and presume to know what’s done in the capitol,” is the acmé of desolation!—

I was half inclined to set forth on my long-promised visits to my two sisters. But Ailesfort Castle, at a distance of three hundred miles, presented an alternative of little promise; and as to the Rothesburys, Jane was still so wholly engrossed by her husband and child, that I might

as well have betaken myself for society to the arm-chair of poor old doting Lady Carleton.

Such was the desponding state of my feelings, when I received from dear Isabella de Vere one of those letters so full of hope and happiness, which arise out of the abundance of a youthful heart, on the eve of accomplishing its destinies.

“A month more,—only a month more,”—she wrote, “and Lord and Lady Kincardine’s answer will arrive!—Already, Addenbrooke and myself are projecting our arrangements. There is a beautiful *Marino* on the coast of Sussex which he has begged of his father, for our habitation. It was bequeathed to the Kincardines by a maiden aunt; and being too insignificant to comport with their ideas of family dignity, they have never inhabited the place.—Helena is busy japanning me a set of pannels for a morning-room; and Adeline and the two girls are toiling away over their tapestry-frames, for a set of furniture. Think how delightful, to have my new abode adorned by the kindness of my dear sisters! Addenbrooke is to contribute to my new drawing-room, (“a double cherry seeming-parted,”) *himself*, and a fine portrait by Hoppner, for which he sat last summer. I begin to long, dear aunt, for this same paradise of Woodbeach; for I have no great predilection for Vere Court; and mamma is just now depressed in spirits, which does not enhance the charms of the place. Poor Henry has been worse; and his health is beginning to suffer from the disturbance of his mind. Afflicted as he is, and without hope of cure, it might be imagined that my mother would easily resign herself to the prospect of losing him. But this is so far from the case, that, since his illness, she has confined herself wholly to his apartments; and appears more attached to this unhappy boy than to any other of her children. As soon as he is able to bear the journey, we shall quit Vere Court; that he may resume his residence at Bright-helmstone. I know not why, but I cannot help fancying that some important change is about to take place in the family!—

“Meanwhile, I doubt whether my dear aunt, who is so partial to the Duke of Sicignano, will be pleased to hear that

Lord Mount-Hardington is not only still here, but has evidently made some progress in the favour of Helena. He has the good sense and good taste to abstain from the most remote allusion to his pretensions. But he is always by her side,—always at her orders,—ready to walk, ride, drive, converse, or be silent, as suits her little ladyship's fancy. Altogether, it would not *very* much surprise me if this generous devotion eventually wrought a change in the sentiments of my sister. And as the positiveness of my mother's character precludes all chance of her withdrawing an interdiction, in the face of which not one of her daughters would find courage to give way to her inclinations, you may inscribe Helena in your mind as sooner or later Lady Mount-Hardington.

“Addenbrooke has been three times into the library to quarrel with me for bestowing on Mrs. De Vere so large a portion of the time which already he takes the liberty of considering his own! Every day increases his attachment; and were it not for the hazard said by the superstitious to attend such boasts, I should not hesitate to proclaim myself the happiest creature in the world!”

* * * * *

“Be happy,—young and innocent heart!”—was my involuntary exclamation, as I perused her letter. “Be happy, as you deserve.” But the information it afforded excited many a conjecture in my mind. I could easily understand the Duchess's disquietude for her son. On the death of the young Duke, of whose person and estate she was sole guardian, the De Vere property would pass to a collateral branch, leaving her only Vere Park as a dower-house, with an inconsiderable income. The girls, too, were slenderly provided for; and though the marriage of the three elder would lessen her incumbrances, Susan and Maria would remain to diminish her means, without increasing her happiness. No one who had ever seen the Duchess after the fall of the curtain of society, could be deceived into the idea that she derived a moment's pleasure from the society of her daughters.

Under these prospects, a scheme presented itself, to which I lost no time in soliciting her sanction. I offered

myself as guardian and mother to the two younger girls ; offering to divide between them the inheritance I derived from Lord Hugh de Vere.

“ The world,” said I, wishing to place before her every argument in favour of the plan,—“ will find no cause to cavil at a domestic arrangement so much in accordance with the will of their poor uncle ; more particularly, as the inadequacy of their fortunes to their condition in life, renders their settlement in life precarious. Admitted as I have been to your Grace’s confidence, you will pardon me for explicitly adverting to the probability of your marriage with Lord Pembury ; in which event, I cannot imagine that two girls of the age of my young cousins, would be a welcome addition to your privacy. On the eve of accomplishing long-cherished projects of happiness in a marriage with the object of your early affection, I trust my dear aunt will not deny me this compensation for the untimely destruction of my own domestic felicity.”

That an appeal thus considerately worded, and kindly intended, could excite displeasure on the part of the Duchess of Rochester, did not enter my imagination ; nor can I describe my distress on receiving some days afterwards the following reply :—

“ I ought not to feel surprise, perhaps, at any extent of insult offered me by one in whom I have overlooked such monstrous perfidy and ingratitude.—*Your* treachery was the cause of my husband’s death, and my son’s grievous infirmity. You have supplanted me in the affection of my daughters.—You have supplanted my daughters in the inheritance of their uncle. Penderels, which you enjoy as the reward of your intrigues, should have been their property. Yet you presume to offer as a benefactress, what you ought to surrender as a restitution !

“ Of the outrage towards myself contained in your letter, I say nothing. If the memory of your mother did not interpose to preserve her sister from your insults, my rebuke would little avail.—Henceforward, let me hear no more of you ! Whether as my kinswoman, or as the heiress of Lord Hugh de Vere, I banish you from my house and heart.”

Though accustomed to the caprices of the Duchess,

this letter appeared inexplicable. But the newspapers of the day soon brought a solution of the enigma, in an announcement, that "On Monday, 1st of December, was married, at the parish church of Ballylidwell, in the county of Clare, John Earl of Pembury, to Ellen, youngest daughter of the Rev. William Power, rector of Ballylidwell."—The Duchess had, therefore, reason to infer that my letter conveyed a wilful and deliberate impertinence.

Moralists are apt to assert that sin is its own punishment, and virtue its own reward. Let them add to these axioms that a fallen woman's bitterest chastisement is usually inflicted by her lover. Most men revenge the faults committed in their favour.

It would have been too much to expect of a libertine like Lord Pembury, to sacrifice himself to a woman no longer young or beautiful,—whose youth and beauty had been deformed by the violence of her temper, and weakness of her principles. He had known the Duchess as a bad wife,—a bad mother. His own disgraceful connection with her was cemented by a pledge revolting to the feelings of both ; and I could almost pardon an act for which both feeling and principle suggested so much in extenuation.

But similar indulgence was not to be expected from the Duchess. *Her* sacrifices were unrepaid ; *her* expectations frustrated, *her* pride was incurably wounded. A woman forty years of age is peculiarly sensitive on the score of her personal charms. She espies the first gray hair,—the earliest wrinkle,—the impaired lustre of her beauty,—long before it becomes generally manifest ; and to the decay of her beauty, the Duchess attributed the cruel disappointment of her expectations.

In pondering over these things, I forgave the petulance of her letter. I saw how easy it was to construe mine into an insult. To her, after the death of her idiotic son, and the marriage of her elder daughters, the company of these younger girls would perhaps become all in all.

Meanwhile there was a bright side to the picture. The prospects of the elder girls afforded decided cause for exultation. Not a mother in London but envied her such sons-in-law, as Addenbrooke, Mount-Hardington, and Rawborne. With *them* were Mammon and Lucifer,—riches

and pride ; and if driven in her own person from the field, she triumphed in the destinies of her offspring.

The season was now becoming one of general anxiety. The expected birth of an Heir to the throne imparted considerable interest in the eyes of the world to those domestic feuds at Carlton House, which, under other circumstances, might have been regarded as the early squabbles of an ill-assorted marriage. But when it reached the public, that the Princess of Wales, about to become a mother, had insisted on the dismissal of Lady Jersey, and insisted in vain, it was pretty generally inferred that the expected offspring would prove the last ; and that on the approaching event hung all hope of succession from the elder branch of the House of Brunswick.

Great, therefore, was the disappointment of the public when, early in the month of January, the birth of a Princess dismissed the great officers of state from an attendance, which we had hoped would certify the advent of a Prince George, instead of a Princess Charlotte. For who was to anticipate the interest eventually excited in the country by the fine frank English character of that

Fair-haired daughter of the Isles ?

She came unwelcomed. Her birth brought with it no customary promise of "boys hereafter." Complete disunion existed between the parents of a babe whose birth occurred within their first year of wedded union ! The King, when he came to offer his benediction to the cradle of this new generation of his dynasty, was met with tears on the part of a young mother, who ought to have been experiencing the highest womanly triumph : and smiles of cold disdain from his son, in whom indifference was soured into disgust.

It was from the public papers I was now fated to learn the retirement of Lady Isabella de Vere from the household of the Princess of Wales. However anxious to know whether the measure originated in the approach of her union with Lord Addenbrooke, or was simply an act of her own will, (for Isabella had just attained her majority,) I had no means of ascertaining the truth. In the gay circles of my own neighbourhood, the conversa-

tion was engrossed by topics connected with the irritation of the public mind: the insult offered to the Queen by hoisting a tri-coloured flag over the Tower of London during the celebration of her birthday, and by a stone flung into her carriage as she returned from a visit to Drury Lane theatre. Royalty was just then under a cloud. The French princes had arrived at Holyrood; unhappy emigrants, with neither means to support their dignity nor dignity to support their means; while our own Prince,—our own future Sovereign,—laden with the benefactions of the country, was not only involved in ruinous lawsuits with usurious creditors, but imagined himself under the necessity of declining the official congratulations of the city of London on the birth of the Heiress Presumptive, on the plea of having an establishment insufficient to receive with becoming form the visit of the civic officers.

On the Continent, too, republicanism was not only gaining strength, but gaining ground. The name of Bonaparte found its way for the first time to England, in connection with the invading army about to pour from the summit of the Alps upon the plains of Italy; and the intelligence of that prodigious movement brought with it a thousand terrors for my family. Hitherto, notwithstanding the gloomy aspect of affairs, Mrs. Mordaunt had refused to quit Italy. But after the address of the French Directory to the armies of France previous to carrying the war into Piedmont, Henry became peremptory; and it was settled that Clara and her boy should sail from Genoa by a British merchant vessel.

The jeopardy of Henry and his family ought, perhaps, to have absorbed my whole interest. Nevertheless, I could not help feeling angry with my brother for his unkind silence relative to the position and projects of my cousin Algernon. How could I tell but that Mr. Rawborne, so long acclimatised in Italy, might feel sufficiently rooted in the soil to enrol himself in her defence?—How could I feel sure that, weary of inaction, he might not take arms under the Austrian banner, against the common foe of Italy and England?—

Meanwhile, the alarmists pursued the ringing of their

toesin ; the daily journals contributing to the public panic all the sinister prognostics that the blackest ink could conjure up. Though the army of the King of Sardinia amounted to sixty thousand men, while the Papal States and those of the King of Naples were actively embodying their available troops, little doubt was entertained in England that the hardy, resolute, and enthusiastic soldiers of France would succeed against the enervated and discontented Italian mercenaries. The Austrians, under the command of a general already unfortunate in the Netherlands, seemed to promise an insufficient support ; and interested as I was in comprehending every shade and contingency of the affair, I already anticipated for the troops of Bonaparte those fatal triumphs, which formed a basis for the future fame of the arch-enemy of the British nation.

With the self-consciousness of a woman nourishing at her heart's core a sentiment contrary to reason, I fancied my friends were watching my countenance and demeanour for indications of the anxiety of my mind. I would not so much as open a newspaper in the presence of my servants, lest they should see written in my inquiring eyes the names of "Venice"—or "Algernon." And when at length I determined on passing a few days in town for the prosecution of my inquiries, I placed my departure from Penderels to the account of a dentist,—a mantua-maker,—or some such idle pretext ; fearing, as none but a woman would have dreamed of fearing, that my brother and housekeeper were as much occupied as myself with the destinies of the Cisalpine Littoral.

But accountable as one feels in a circumscribed country-establishment to the little knot of domestic spies called upper-servants, in the publicity of a London hotel I felt privileged to despatch a note to the Duke of Sicignano, without fear of the animadversions of my housekeeper's room ; and while his object in hastening to answer it in person was to obtain intelligence respecting Helena and her mother, *mine* was fulfilled by the readiness with which he informed me that Algernon had quitted Venice. The friend whose letter incidentally communicated the fact, added that he had left them on

the honourable mission of escorting a defenceless woman to her native country ; and neither the Duke nor myself hesitated to affix to the fair one to whose protection he had devoted himself, the name of Alidea di Visconti !

It might be that the vexation with which I lent myself to this supposition, imparted unusual bitterness to my feelings, for it certainly was not my wont to be unmindful of the susceptibility of others. But when, after gratifying my curiosity, the Duke proceeded to satisfy his own by a thousand interrogations concerning the Duchess, unwilling to make a merit in his eyes of my championship of his cause, I simply stated that I feared he must resign himself to the decree of the Duchess.

But, alas ! I had not sufficiently calculated on the intemperate character of Sicignano. I, whose experience of the passions lay chiefly in that class of my countrymen who *think* so much more deeply than they *feel*,—I, who had seen Fitzirnham for so long a period, and Algernon for a period much longer, impose silence on their sentiments for myself, while Sir Claude Lovell and Sir Robert Warley had needed only a hint of my indifference to withdraw their suit at once and for ever,—I could scarcely enter into the intensity of passion inflaming the soul of the young Neapolitan ! Scarcely had I let fall the suggestion that it would be wiser to abandon his pretensions, when he burst forth into such violence as caused me to repent my indiscretion ;—insisted on knowing the worst, on knowing all ;—till I was at last obliged to remedy one rashness by a greater, and admit that the sisters of Lady Helena regarded his cause as lost.

At that word, the vehemence of the Duke subsided. A deathlike pallor overspread his face, while he interrogated me anew, with less impetuosity but the deepest feeling.

“ Were I not apprehensive of giving you pain,” I began,—but hesitated, watching his countenance for encouragement.—

“ No fears, I beseech you, on that head !”—interrupted Sicignano. “ I have deceived myself,—it were an act of cruelty did others continue to deceive me ! All I desire now is to see things in their true light. I trust I have

sense and fortitude to bear even a greater misfortune than the loss of a woman's liking."

"Since you are so reasonable," I replied, "I will not hesitate to own that Isabella and Adeline, the confidantes of their sister, are of opinion that she has resigned herself to the authority of her mother; and that in time she will probably—"

"No more!" interrupted the Duke, in a faint voice. "I have heard enough to undeceive my expectations. Let me not learn what would break my heart."

My surprise at this sudden change of tone was painted in my looks. "It is all for the best!" he added, with a forced smile. "I could never have submitted to a mother-in-law so imperious as the Duchess of Rochester."

His assumed cheerfulness did not deceive me. I saw that Sicignano was deeply wounded; and after his departure, regretted that I had ventured to withdraw the veil from his eyes.

But it was not of the Duke of Sicignano I had now to think; it was of Algernon,—it was of myself. Since my cousin was sufficiently devoted to the Countess Visconti to become her escort in the face of the world, it was clear that his preference was of a higher character than a mere *liaison*. He must dearly love her. He had altogether forgotten his cousin.

Recoiling from the notion of shutting myself up at Penderels alone with my tribulation, I resolved to set off immediately for Ailesfort Castle; for scarcely a week elapsed without my receiving from Helen the most urgent invitations. I was in the act of writing to announce to my sister that I was on the point of departure for the north, when a letter in a handwriting I could scarcely recognise was placed in my hand; imploring me in the name of all my affection for themselves—all my gratitude towards their uncle—to proceed to Brighthelmstone.

It needed not the signatures of Isabella and Helena de Vere to tell me that it was my cousins who needed my good offices; and at such a suggestion, I was willing to defy even the arrogance of their mother. Laying aside my despatches for Lady Ailesfort, I caused my horses' heads to be turned towards the Brighton road.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THIS unexpected journey insured a day of perplexed thoughts and painful emotions. My mind wandered back through the lapse of years to the humiliating period when I had quitted the spot, rescued from the treachery of my aunt by the affectionate interposition of Algernon Rawborne; and the recollection of her unprincipled conduct on that occasion, almost justified the surmises of evil I began to entertain on account of her daughters. I reproached myself for not having more peremptorily exercised the authority bequeathed me by Lord Hugh.

At first, she had conciliated me by the amendment of her maternal dispositions. But in her recent conduct towards Isabella and Helena, she seemed to have forgotten herself, and me, and them. I prepared myself therefore to find the girls suffering under some new severity;—to learn perhaps on my arrival, that Lord Addenbrooke had been dismissed with as little ceremony as the Duke of Sicignano; or that she was insisting on the immediate union of Helena with Lord Mount-Hardington.

It was evening when I reached Brightelmstone; and having taken up my abode at an hotel, I despatched a note to Helena to inquire whether her mother was in a state of mind to admit of my presenting myself at her residence. The poor girl's reply was contained in the following incoherent lines:—

“Thank you for coming so soon. We expect you.—My poor mother is not likely even to notice your arrival.

H. De V.”

Thus encouraged, I hastened to the house.—Helena, who was in waiting to receive me, threw herself into my arms, mingling tears with her embraces; and having entered the drawing-room on her arm, I found Lady Isabella reclining on the sofa, in a state of utter prostration, with Adeline sitting by her side, holding in her own the hand of the sufferer.

“Dearest child!—you have been ill, and without giving me a word of warning?” said I, bending over Isabella, and imprinting a kiss on her pale cheek.

“I shall be better now you are come!” she faltered, in reply. “I want some one to inspire me with wisdom and fortitude. These dear sisters of mine give me only such soothing consolation as encourages me to bewail my affliction rather than meet it as I ought.”

“Your affliction, dear Isabella?” I exclaimed. “What has befallen you?”

“The extinction of my happiness for life!” replied my young cousin, attempting a melancholy smile. “The answer from India is unfavourable.”

“More than unfavourable!” whispered Lady Adeline, placing her arm round my waist as we stood together beside her sister. “Lord and Lady Kincardine have expressed themselves in terms so insulting to mamma, that Isabella feels it her duty not even to expose herself to the pain of another interview with Addenbrooke.”

“But what could tempt Lord Addenbrooke to exhibit to your sister a letter offensive to her mother?”

“He was with us when the packet reached him; and his horror in perusing its contents was unconcealable. Addenbrooke was so convinced, too, that certain expressions used by Lady Kincardine must originate in some error—some misunderstanding,—that he expressed his conviction to that effect in presence of my mother. But alas! poor mamma’s emotion clearly proved that *she* understood the purport of the accusation so much a mystery to ourselves.”

“Unhappy woman!”

“It is surely *I* who have the best claim to compassion!” said Isabella, turning her languid face towards me. “*I* have never offended Addenbrooke’s family. Judging by Lady Kincardine’s letters to her son, *I* feel that few persons would have suited her so well as a daughter-in-law. She demanded a submissive disposition, and mine has indeed been tutored to submission!”

“When the Kincardines become personally acquainted with you—” I began.

“We shall never become acquainted!” said Isabella.

“After the expressions used by them towards my family, I could never love or respect them as parents.—They are not likely to visit England for years. Thank Heaven, we shall never meet.”—

“And how did poor Addenbrooke support his disappointment?”

“He quitted us almost in a state of frenzy.—The blow fell upon him so unexpectedly!—He had been preparing everything for his marriage; persuaded that his choice would gratify the fondest expectations of his family.”

“And whither is he gone?”

“His projects are, at present, those of a madman,” faltered Lady Isabella. “He is bent on sailing for India with the first fleet, to meet by personal argument the opposition of his parents.”

“It is on this head, dear Mrs. De Vere, we hope for your assistance,” interposed Lady Helena. “It is you alone who will bring him to reason. Isabella will not hear of his incurring uselessly the peril and annoyance of such a voyage. What arguments *could* he use to alter the opinions of Lord and Lady Kincardine?—That he loves Lady Isabella de Vere to distraction!—They know it, and disregard it! The calumnies they have allowed themselves to utter, *he* has no means to refute. Circumstances which occurred fifteen years ago, must always be better known to *them* than to *us*. ”

“And even were we able to prove their falsehood,” added Isabella, “the harshness shown by Addenbrooke’s family has extinguished all inclination on my part to belong to them. But promise me,” she added, “to see *him*!—Promise me to reconcile him to our change of prospects!”

I endeavoured to reassure her by those vague encouragements we offer to the unhappy. But they did not deceive Isabella.

“No, no!” she replied, pressing my hand with grateful tenderness to her lips. “I admit the kindness of your intention. But you do not deceive me. Deep as is the injury offered to my mother,—bitter the affliction to myself,—it is time I should nerve myself for the realities of the case.”

“And the Duchess?” I inquired, turning towards Helena.—“Is she aware of your having written to me?”

“She is aware of nothing!—Henry is in a hopeless state; I should say in his last moments, but that for this fortnight past, we have expected every day would end his sufferings.”

“He suffers, then?”

“Impossible to see a human creature more miserably afflicted.—Mamma never leaves his side; but sits watching his tortures, as if every pang were more agonising to *her* than to himself.”

“Have you courage,” said I, to apprise her of my arrival?—I must not be a clandestine inmate of her house.”

“We have courage to tell her of anything *now*,”—replied Lady Adeline. “She is so subdued, that her worst enemy would behold her with compassion.”

She proceeded accordingly to execute my mission, and instantly brought back from my aunt an earnest entreaty to see me. Even to the girls, I dared not avow my repugnance to enter the presence of the young Duke; still less would I have made it perceptible to his unhappy mother. And when, leaning on the arm of Lady Adeline, I proceeded to his apartments, I paused on the threshold, trembling at the prospect of the spectacle.

I expected violence—shrieks—outcries. Alas! on entering the room, I beheld only the attenuated form of a fair boy, extended in a state of stupor on a couch. On a chair beside him, sat the Duchess,—motionless,—rigid,—her eyes fixed on the face of the dying child.—As I approached and she became conscious of my presence, she extended her hand affectionately without turning her looks towards me; and the words that escaped her lips were scarcely intelligible. I motioned to my companion to leave us; feeling that the Duchess might wish to receive me alone, at such a crisis of humiliation.

“Look at him!”—faltered she, as Helena quitted the room,—pointing to the sharpened features of the ill-fated being before us. “A few hours more, and the object which for twelve long years has engrossed every impulse

of my soul, will be dust!—GOD has heavily punished me, Lizzy;—punished me where my heart was sorest.—I ought to have loved those girls!—They were good, beautiful, affectionate.—I have cared only for this afflicted boy.”

“ You will have the girls to love and to console you, when he is no more,” was all I could utter in reply.

“ No! they are lost to me for ever!”—ejaculated the Duchess. “ That letter from India has revealed all the secrets of the past. They are still dutiful. But they cannot in their hearts feel towards me as before.”

“ Pardon me!—Isabella understands nothing of the Kincardines’ accusations, except that they purport offence to *you*, and consequently to herself. She assures me that no future concessions would induce her to enter a family, the members of which had spoken injuriously of her mother.”

“ Did she say so?” demanded the Duchess, turning towards me a countenance so changed that I could scarcely recognise the features.

“ She said more, and was fully supported by her sisters.”

“ Poor girls!—Poor children!—They have not yet mingled indiscriminately with the world, to learn all that will be hereafter unfolded to them by malicious tongues. I have done you grievous wrong, Lizzy. I always fancied you had been more communicative to them of the past than the ties of kindred between us could excuse. I do you justice now. I feel that you have not been my enemy with my daughters. I have been my own,—*always* my own!”—

A convulsive start from the young Duke diverted her attention:—a start followed by the recurrence of total insensibility.

“ Poor, precious, miserable outcast!”—faltered the Duchess, wiping the cold dew from his wasted forehead. “ But for his occasional tortures, I should scarcely know that he still breathed. “ Look at him,—helpless,—almost lifeless;—and admire how little an all-just GOD has permitted him to profit by wealth and titles, *his* only in virtue of my treacheries. Poor Henry!—Better to have been born the hardy healthy offspring of some honest

labourer, than spring from the gilded couch of sin.—The jealous hand of the Almighty has overtaken us!"

I strove to divert her attention from herself by inquiries concerning the medical advisers of the young Duke.

"They have done nothing for him,—they *could* do nothing.—They have not spared him a pang!" said she, with a sudden burst of irritation. "This morning I dismissed them from their attendance;—for they came only to pry into my wretchedness. But I was wrong!" said she, dashing away the tears from her cheek.—"This house is marked as their prey. I shall only have to recall them. They must come to dismiss my poor Isabella in due form and ceremony to the grave.—The girl will die, Mrs. De Vere!—I know her tenderness of heart.—A few months' fretting, and all will be over."

"Do not anticipate evil.—You have only too many misfortunes present with you!" said I. "Lady Isabella is the most generous of human beings; and the happiness of her sisters will restore her peace of mind."

"The happiness of her sisters!" ejaculated the Duchess. "Alas! on how sandy a foundation does it rest!—I see things no longer as I once saw them. My pride is crushed—my vanity withered. I would fain bequeath to those children less cause to curse my memory. You, Lizzy, are unbiassed by personal prejudice. While you remain with us, apply your clear judgment to study the feelings of Helena; and should you find her preference of the Duke of Sicignano what you once believed it, I leave it to your kindness to bring them together."

All this I readily promised; and even comforted her by compliance with her entreaties that, for the present, I would remain an inmate under her roof.

"The girls stand in need of an adviser and protectress!" said she. "For, alas, I am less than nothing to them now!"—And leaning over the young sufferer, she impressed a silent kiss on his unconscious forehead. Then suddenly recollecting that I must be tired with my journey, she dismissed me for the night; and seemed to receive as a favour the embrace I did not hesitate to bestow on the humbled and contrite woman.

Such, then, was the end of all her manœuvres,—all her

faults,—all her follies,—all her sins! On every side, humiliation—on every side, retribution. My chief anxiety was to preserve the girls from participating more than was inevitable in the harshness of her destinies. Whatever might befall her on the death of the Duke,—and there was reason to fear that her former inconsiderate prodigality would plunge her into immediate difficulties,—I had still a home to shelter them, and tenderness to render it a happier one to them than to myself. I retired to rest, resolving in the first instance to seek a private conference with Lady Helena, and ascertain her present dispositions towards the Duke of Sicignano.

Very early, however, on the following morning, long before I was restored in either mind or body from the fatigues of the preceding day, I was roused by my attendant from a heavy sleep; and instantly discerned in her countenance tokens of dismay.

“Is all over?” cried I, starting up.

“I humbly trust not!” she replied. “But there is no hope.—You will scarcely be there in time, Madam, to see him alive.”

Referring her reply to my own question, which regarded the young Duke of Rochester, I threw on my dressing-gown in haste, and was preparing to follow her to the presence of the Duchess; when the embarrassment of the poor woman proved that some misunderstanding existed. A sad explanation was soon afforded.

More troubles,—more perplexities! My poor father was on his death-bed. An express had been despatched to Penderels;—had followed me to London,—to Brighton.—Mrs. Mordaunt and Richard entreated my immediate presence.

“Go, Lizzy!” faltered the Duchess, tears streaming down her face when she found me on the point of departure. “Fulfil your duties as you have ever fulfilled them; and reap your reward, as heretofore, in the love of all belonging to you. Leave me to this bed of death and suffering, without a friend or hope to cheer me in my afflictions.”

In taking leave of the girls, there was no need to impress upon their minds the necessity of devoting their

utmost solicitude to their mother. All the attention that Helena and Adeline could spare from Isabella, would I knew be devoted to the Duchess. The most dutiful of daughters could not be more considerate towards a parent than those neglected girls.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

I DID not loiter on my journey. The weather, a mild close of the month of March which seemed rather to belong to April, was propitious to my haste ; and, early on the following morning, I reached the lodge-gates of Spetchingley. One word from the porter sufficed to reassure me.—The old man my father was yet alive !

Happy auspices seemed to influence the season and the scene ! The park lay silent in the sunshine. The leafless avenues apparently waited but a signal to put forth their verdure. The aspect of the old hall was full of venerable sadness, as if conscious that the master-spirit was passing away. No servants were loitering round the house,—no gardeners busy in the shrubberies. I would not suffer the carriage to drive up, lest the noise might disturb my father ; but alighting, entered the court-yard on foot. Poor Ladybird, asleep in the sunshine, looked up wistfully as I passed ; apprised by the discomposure of her habits of daily attendance on the 'Squire, that something was amiss.

The nature of my father's disorder having produced considerable oppression, he was not able to rest in a recumbent position ; but sat propped by pillows, dozing in his arm-chair. When I entered the room with Mrs. Mordaunt, my cousin Richard was seated at a little distance, his hands on his knees, and with a face of deep concern ; without a book, without an occupation, save the predominant interest of watching the decline of him on whose life he had so religiously attended. My brother the Archdeacon was expected every moment from the Rectory, for

his daily visit. But Dick Mordaunt never left the house,—rarely even the chamber of the invalid.

Having already learned from Mrs. Mordaunt, that my poor father's hours were numbered, (the physicians having decided that he would not survive the day,) I was content to see him slumber on so tranquilly, satisfied that his sufferings must be inconsiderable. He woke up refreshed and peaceful, with a smile for Mrs. Mordaunt,—a smile for Dick,—and a burst of affectionate self-gratulation, when they prepared him for my appearance by informing him that his eldest daughter was come from Penderels to visit him.

“Welcome, Lizzy, to Spetchingley; welcome for the last time!” murmured he, as I knelt at his feet. “I told you when you left us, child, you would have to obey *once more* the summons of the old man. Lately, however, I had feared never to see you again. A day or two ago, I fancied all was up with me. But these kind souls have been so thoughtful,—so tender,—watching over me as a mother over her infant,—that I am spared to give you my blessing before I die. Where's young Algernon Mordaunt?—Where's Harry's boy?—Has his aunt seen him?—Isn't he grown, Lizzy?—Hasn't he a look of his father about the eyes?—Do you know, my dear, I've been dreaming all night of my son.—I fancied we were walking together over the home-farm, as we did twenty years ago, when Lady Betty used to be angry with me for keeping the lad out in the dew;—and we went into the paddock where the old bay hunter, and gray Peggy, your poor mother's favourite mare, were turned out to grass; and I wanted Harry to——”

“You must not tire yourself with talking, Sir. The Doctor says we mustn't let you tire yourself with talking,”—interposed Dick Mordaunt, in whose eyes the tears were gathering, as he listened to the broken voice and oppressed breathing of the 'Squire. “We shall send Mrs. De Vere back to Hertfordshire, if she encourages you to talk.”

My father placed *his* hand caressingly on the hard brown hand which leant on the arm of his chair.

“Call her Lizzy, my boy!”—said he. “Your cousin's your cousin, though not to be your wife.—Lizzy! I've no

great fancy for that name of De Vere. 'Tis one that never was a credit to the family ; and since you don't care to take up again with the old one of Mordaunt," he continued, perceiving that poor Dick, thus abruptly apostrophised, had quitted the room, " the sooner you fix on that of some honest man who will help you to make an honourable figure in the world, and be a stay and comfort to your declining years, the better.—I would fain have you marry again."

Unwilling to thwart my father at such a time, I promised to attend to his advice. And certainly, if anything could advocate the cause of matrimony, it would have been the prevalence of "the ruling passion strong in death," manifested by my father. He could not bear his excellent wife to be out of his sight. He had patience with nothing that was not administered by her hand. In spite of his fond affection for his children and grand-children, and more than kinsmanly attachment to Dick Mordaunt, from the face of his wife only emanated the comfort from which his last moments extracted consolation.

My brother Richard came at last ; his attention diverted from his dying father by his ceremonious welcome to myself,—his fears lest I should suffer from fatigue,—his anxiety that I should retire and take some rest ; receiving me *not* as his sister Lizzy, but as Mrs. De Vere of Pendreels Park ! I was glad when his mechanical recitation of the daily service was at an end. To *me* there was more religion in the broken words of patient resignation, uttered by the poor old 'Squire, than in all the studied phraseology of the Archdeacon.

"Lizzy," said my father, when, having dismissed Mrs. Mordaunt and Dick to take some repose, he found himself alone with me, whom he fancied more intimately the friend of my brother than the rest of the family,—"they tell me Harry Mordaunt will soon be coming home, because the French are to be masters in Italy. I could have wished to set eyes on him once more, and give up his boy to his hands. But God's will be done!—So tell him for me, Lizzy, that I died blessing him, and praying that, even as he did unto me, the Almighty may do unto him, and more also.—May his children prove a joy to him, as

mine have proved to *me*. Say, if you think of it, that I recommend to his kindness the old servants and labourers. I have begged to have six of them carry the poor old 'Squire to his grave. No display—no fine horses and plumes—for Mordaunt of Spetchingley, that was snatched from beggary by the worthiness of his son. Let my own people attend, and no other. They have been good servants to me;—God send that I prove not to have been a bad master to *them*."

I begged him to desist from these trying allusions. But he chose to be heard to the end.

"And tell Harry I could wish Bob Addington to get the renewal of his lease, on easy terms. Old Addington was out with me as a boy, my first day's hunting, sixty year back, the first fence that ever I cleared.—It seems but yesterday!—Don't forget to say a word for old Addington."

"Make yourself easy, dearest father, Henry will take care of him."

"And if my son wouldn't take it amiss," he resumed, "I should like poor Ladybird to go to Dick Mordaunt. She's not the dog old Ladybird was before her, so that Harry will never miss her.—But Dick's used to the beast, and the beast to him; and when September comes, I should like her to be in Spetchingley woods again, though the old man—"

He paused.—Nature would have its way.—The tears long gathered in his eyes, dropped upon my hand.

"I know I am wrong to think of such things at such a time," he resumed at length. "My son Richard would reprove me, if he knew I was thinking of dogs and leases, when my affections ought to be elsewhere. But one can't help it, Lizzy. And now, let's talk of better things."

We *did* talk of better things; and I found my father's frame of mind greatly to be envied;—full of Faith,—Hope,—Charity,—yet humble as became the humility of a Christian. He reviled himself with the oversights which had occasioned his banishment from the house of his ancestors. But his life had, in fact, been one of as blameless a tenour as is consistent with the frailty of mortal nature.

Towards evening, he rallied; excited, as it was supposed, by the sight of his daughter Lizzy. He had expressly

desired that Jane and Helen, settled at so great a distance from Spetchingley, might not be sent for; he had insisted only on seeing the favourite child of Lady Betty. I wrote, however, to apprise my sisters of the change that was taking place, and entertained little doubt they would hold it their duty to hasten to Spetchingley.

What a touching spectacle was it to behold the labourers crowding to the gate, to inquire after their friend and benefactor!—Not a sound was to be heard in the house,—not a whistle or cry of joy in the fields,—in the fear of creating disquiet for the 'Squire. The second day after my arrival, was the Sabbath; and when prayers were demanded by my brother of the congregation in Spetchingley church, "for one labouring under grievous bodily affliction," not an individual present but bent the knee; and many a gray head was bowed down with sorrow to know that the snares of death were encompassing their good old 'Squire.

That night was one of exceeding restlessness,—exceeding pain. My father dozed at intervals, only to be awoke by distressing dreams; and careful as we had all been to abstain from referring in his presence to the hazards experienced by Clara and her son, instinct seemed to acquaint him that something was amiss. In his sleep, he constantly murmured the names of Henry and the boys.

"Oh! that my eyes could but rest upon him once again!—Oh! that my eyes could rest once more upon my son!" I heard him secretly ejaculate; little dreaming that the last wish of the good old man was about to be fulfilled! Early on the following day, on hearing the sound of an approaching carriage and seeing from the window a post-chaise-and-four in the avenue, I concluded it was the Rothesburys who, using the utmost speed, might already reach Spetchingley in reply to my letter.

My father turned his eyes inquiringly towards me, as I returned from the window.

"One of my sisters, Sir, I believe," said I, in answer to his mute interrogation.

"Poor Helen!—Poor Jane!—they ought not to have been disturbed from their happy homes," he faltered. "I can scarcely see them now,—my eyes are dim."

At that moment, little Algernon, who sat reading at his grandfather's feet, started up exclaiming, "I hear Papa's voice!—I hear Papa's footsteps!"

"Hush, hush!" said I, perceiving that the mere conjecture had brought a hectic flush into my father's face, and that his hands trembled with agitation.

"It *is* my Papa—I say it *is* my Papa!" persisted the child, as the door was gently opened, and my brother Henry, his countenance overpowered with emotion, glided towards my father. The old man ought to have been prepared. But it was too late now.—The servants had told my brother that their master was in the agonies of death; and Henry lost not a second.

The old man made a last effort to lay his hand upon the head of his idolised son; and in the attempt, fell back breathless!—A smile of inexpressible delight was imprinted on his venerable face as it gave way to the relaxing touch of death; and when we knelt down around him, and commended his spirit to the Almighty, we felt that he had been summoned away in a moment of unalloyed happiness.

It needed not the formal exhortation of the Archdeacon to assure us that such is the Death of the Just!—



CHAPTER XXXIX.

ALL was ordered at Spetchingley after the manner indicated by my father; and his whole family was once more re-united to lay his gray hairs with honour in the grave. His coffin was borne by his own people,—followed by his own children.—But it was followed also by a voluntary procession of the neighbouring gentry, from a distance of thirty miles round. The manner in which Mr. Mordaunt had given himself up to mortification and privation, for the re-establishment of his affairs, had won respect from all classes of his Leicestershire neighbours; and Mrs. Mordaunt had the heartfelt consolation of knowing that,

in spite of intervening clouds, the star of her husband's life had set in greater lustre than it rose.

Grievous, meanwhile, were the auspices under which my brother succeeded to his inheritance. As soon as we could withdraw our thoughts from our recent affliction, we had to listen to poor Henry's alarms at the non-arrival of Clara and his son, whom he had expected to find in England; and whose risks as travellers on the Continent at such a crisis, were of a far from trivial nature.

"Nevertheless," observed my brother, "with so kind and wise a protector, I feel my poor wife to be as secure of care and consideration, as though I were by her side."

"I was not aware," said I, "that you have been enabled to intrust your family to confidential hands?"

"Have you not heard, then," cried he, "that Algy Rawborne, on learning my dilemma set off for Turin and undertook the charge of conveying his cousins to England?"

"Just what I should have expected from Algernon!" I exclaimed. "God send them a safe journey."

And thus, on one thorny point, my mind was unexpectedly set at rest. My cousin was returning to his native country in the spontaneous execution of one of those duties to which his generous life had been devoted. It was for a member of the Mordaunt family, too, that he was braving difficulty and danger; and in the depths of my heart, I could not help flattering myself that "Lizzy" had some share in securing his good services for Clara and Henry. It is true they, also, were his cousins.—But they were not, like myself, the idols of his youth.

"Everything has been against me," said Henry, in a desponding voice, after having recapitulated the difficulties likely to befall these beloved travellers, and the dangers to which he had himself been personally exposed. "On setting foot yesterday in London, where I expected to find my wife and child established in safety, the first person I encountered at the Foreign Office was my old friend Castelcicala, come to announce to Government the dreadful end of poor Sicignano."

"The dreadful end of poor Sicignano?" I repeated, with a look of horror. "My dearest Harry!—You must

be dreaming. Scarcely five days ago, I parted from the Duke in perfect health!"

"Five days are as five centuries, in such a case. Last night, I saw him in his coffin! Unaware of the imminence of my father's danger, I could not refuse Castelcicala's request that I would accompany him to the hotel where our unhappy friend put an end to his existence. I assisted him to place seals on the Duke's effects, and communicate the sad event to the Sicignano family."

"And is no motive assigned?" I exclaimed, scarcely able to breathe when I reflected on the incautiousness of my communications to him respecting Lady Helena de Vere.

"None!—He transacted business that morning with Lord Grenville, in a composed and able manner. He was in no personal difficulties; for bills of five thousand pounds, on London bankers, were found in his desk. Grenier, and the rest of the people at the hotel, give the highest praise to his regular and punctual habits, bewailing him, indeed, as if they had lost a friend."

"Did he leave no letter?"

"None that afforded explanation. Since the case of the unfortunate Duke of Rochester, (which I do not even yet fully understand,) no instance has occurred of a suicide so involved in mystery. Young, handsome, noble, wealthy—happy in his engagement to one of the loveliest and most amiable girls in England—"

"*There*, I fear, lies the origin of all!" cried I, interrupting him in deep affliction. "The Duchess having peremptorily interdicted their union, has for some time past promoted a match between Helena and Lord Mount-Hardington; and in my last interview with the Duke, I unluckily admitted my conviction, that all hope of a conclusion in his favour was at an end."

"You have indeed developed this afflicting mystery," replied Henry, gravely.

"But not, alas! my own share in accelerating the catastrophe. Twice, my dear Henry,—twice have I been the innocent cause of self-murder!" cried I, in unspeakable distress.

"My dearest Lizzy!"

“But for Fitzirnham’s impetuous defence of myself and inculpation of the Duchess, the Duke of Rochester might be yet alive; and on quitting Brighton for Spetchingley four days ago, I was commissioned by my aunt to replace things on their former footing between Helena and Sicignano. Engrossed by the perilous condition of my father, I gave no further thought to them.—And behold the result!”

“You acted, my dear sister, as others would have done in your place. A dying father was necessarily your first object. And who could suppose the sensibility of that gay-hearted young man to be so profoundly touched!”

“This very day, I purposed writing to him!”—said I. “And he is already consigned to the grave!—What will become of Helena!—I received a letter yesterday from the poor girl, assuring me of the unaltered state of her affections, and imploring me to bring about a reconciliation between her mother and lover!”

“Helena is young. An impression so recently imbibed may be eventually obliterated. *My* compassion regards rather the mother and sister of Sicignano. He was an only son; the line of an ancient family is broken by his untimely death; and how will his lovely sister Leonora* surmount the loss of the companion of her childhood?—

* Extract from the Annual Register:—“DIED, at Grenier’s hotel, in Jermyn Street, about six o’clock in the evening, the DUKE OF SICIGNANO, lately arrived here as Ambassador from Naples. A paper, which was found on the table, in the Duke’s handwriting, declared ‘that the act was his own free choice; that no one was to be blamed, nor was any one privy to it.’ He had said to his secretary, about an hour before, that he should dine at the Imperial Ambassador’s; and expressed a wish that whenever he did not immediately answer a knock at the door, no person should repeat the knocking, or endeavour to come in. The secretary had occasion to call upon him in the evening, and receiving no answer to his rap, went away, according to the wish of the Duke. After a second and third unsuccessful attempt, he was alarmed; and the door being locked, was burst open by the servants. The body, when found, was still moving, but, as the surgeons declared, merely by the convulsions of death. The ball had passed through his head, and he died a few minutes afterwards. The motive of this violence against himself cannot be discovered. Bills of credit for £5,000 were found in his escritoire. He was not thirty years of age, of a very favourable appearance, and a disposition evenly, and even powerfully cheerful. As soon as the event became known, Prince Castelcicala and some other foreign noblemen went to Grenier’s to view the body, and took charge of his effects. Next morning, Mr. Burgess, one of his Majesty’s Under Secretaries of State, at the request of

Never was man more truly beloved in his family than the poor Duke of Sicignano!"

"I have scarcely courage to reflect on the aggravated calamities befalling, day after day, the house of De Vere!" cried I, unable to sympathise as I wished in the interest testified by Henry for his Neapolitan friends.

"Providence is just!" replied my brother, gravely. "The end of our good father was full of consolation. The Duchess, whose life has been one of unmerited and unimproved prosperity, has fallen at length into the shade."

Before I quitted Spetchingley, indeed, the measure of the Duchess's misfortunes was accomplished! The newspapers announced in one brief line, the decease of "Henry Duke of Rochester, a minor;" and devoted a column to the enumeration of the high-sounding titles and prodigious property devolving, in consequence of this event, upon "Henry Whitehouse de Vere, Esq., of Gartonside, in the county of Westmoreland, who succeeds to the Marquisate of De Vere and all the English honours,—the dukedom of Rochester being extinct. "Henry Whitehouse de Vere," said the journals of the day, "now Marquis de Vere, Earl of Penderels, Viscount Colne, Baron Gartonside, Wold, and Wolstenholm, descends in a direct line from John, second son of Lord Francis, third son of Hugh, second Duke of Rochester, who was raised to that dignity by King James I. The Marquis was united, on the 3rd of May, 1748, to Mary, only daughter of John Doblyns Smith, by whom he has had sixteen children, of whom fifteen survive—seven sons and eight daughters; the eldest, now Earl of Penderels, having married, in 1770, Miss Grace Wroughton, of Chingle Park, by whom he has a family of ten children. The Marquis comes into immediate possession of Vere Court, in Lancashire; Castle Wolstenholm, in the county of Monaghan; Beaufort House, in the county of Middle-

Lord Grenville, went to the hotel, to make the necessary inquiries concerning the suicide, and to give orders for the removal and interment of the corpse; and an express was sent off to Naples with the melancholy news. The Duke was a young nobleman of one of the best families in Italy, of very amiable manners, and much beloved by those who knew him. A lovely sister is dangerously ill from the melancholy event having been communicated to her in too sudden a manner.

sex, besides estates in the counties of York and Westmoreland; altogether comprehending a rent-roll of between eighty and ninety thousand pounds per annum."

And thus, some forty or fifty obscure individuals received their share in the compensations of Providence; while the guilty woman, so long triumphant, was dismissed to a humble mediocrity. Instead of Courts and Castles, the small estate of Vere Park, in Berkshire, was to constitute her sole possession. Plate, diamonds, all the ducal appanage of the wyvern-volant, were to be given up to strangers; and the improvident hands which had scarcely found ninety thousand a-year sufficient to supply their prodigality, were hereafter to restrict themselves to two, augmented by about as many more, till the marriage of her daughters. Henceforth, she was to become a cypher in that world of wantonness, in which she had reigned supreme!—

Our little party, meanwhile, readily consented to remove with me from Spetchingley, now so fraught with painful reminiscences, to Penderels, whence the communication with London was immediate. My brother proposed to be chiefly in town till Clara's arrival; having law business on his hands connected with the division of family property, as well as with the affairs of the Duke of Sicignano, the arrangement of which he had undertaken. Mrs. Mordaunt and my worthy cousin now became inmates for the first time, of that once disdainful Lizzy, now so deeply conscious of the value of their friendship. The childish sportiveness of little Algernon served to enliven the depression of our spirits; and, as the spring was breaking, and Hertfordshire assuming that ornate rural elegance for which its trimly parks are so remarkable, I had the pleasure of seeing Penderels in its best array to welcome the travellers.

The period, however, was one of anxious suspense. Every eye, every thought, was constantly directed towards the lodge-gate opening from the London road; and when at last the long-expected vehicle came in sight, and Clara, Henry, and their eldest boy made their appearance, *unaccompanied*, I had no breath to inquire the cause of Algernon's absence.

My fears were charitably relieved by my brother. Algernon was safe—well—but detained in St. James's Square by the serious illness of his brother. A neglected fall the preceding spring at Melton, had produced some inward injury; and the state of the Earl was considered precarious. It was written, in short, that in this, as in all else, the Duchess of Rochester should reap only mortification in her projects for the establishment of her daughters.

It was, however, as Algernon Rawborne—simply as Algernon,—that my dear cousin, during the temporary amendment of his ungracious brother, found his way to Penderels. Confessions and professions followed; ending in a solemn mutual engagement, ratified at the close of a few months by a still dearer—still closer tie.—My friend and benefactor became at length my husband!—

And when the melancholy attendance of this affectionate brother upon the peevish sick-bed of the Earl, terminated in his accession to wealth and distinction, I had the satisfaction of fulfilling a wish dear to my heart, by installing the unfortunate Duchess and her daughters in the family-estate of Penderels; as well as of continuing to soothe by the tenderest affection the sorrows of my ill-fated cousins.

Of my own destinies as a wife, I forbear to speak. Perfect contentment is of so soothing a quality, that I might perhaps lull my readers to a more than desirable mood of quietude by a description of the tranquil destinies of the Countess of Rawborne. With my own Algy, I dwelt afar from what was termed by witlings “the host of Faro,” and the glittering pleasures of the world. We lived in retirement, surrounded by a few cheerful neighbours, and cheered by frequent visits from those eminent men and illustrious politicians, with whom the association of mine and my husband’s early life had made us familiar. Fox, Hare, Fitzpatrick, were our frequent guests. Happy in ourselves—in each other—we—But of that period no more!—

Such reminiscences are too much for my present season of isolation and decrepitude.

CHAPTER XL.

At the commencement of my task as a commemorator of my “life and times,” I designed to treat of the former as comprehended within the happy spring-time of my years; and of the latter, as closing with the close of the last century. For what is the life of a decayed beauty but a cheerless November day, inspiring only gloomy reflections; and how can a woman presume to judge dispassionately of times in which she has ceased to exercise an influence?—

How little did I conjecture, when, on witnessing the dawn of a new age,—again a widow, and, alas! still childless,—I exclaimed in bitterness of heart—“My glory has departed from me,—my days are done!” that I should survive through so vast a portion of its onward progress! At five-and-thirty, withered in heart and soul by my double bereavement, I registered a vow to attempt no further realisation of my chimeras of domestic happiness.—I was rich—a Countess Dowager; but ambition delighted me not, nor splendour either; and for several years after the loss of Lord Rawborne, I remained stationary at an old manor-house situated in the same county with Rawborne Hall, which, being entailed with the title, was now in the hands of a distant kinsman.

But this could not last. My nieces, all of whom were happily married, and my two sisters, whose children were dear to me as my own, successively drew me from my solitude to become their guest; till, from one thing to another, motives of health,—motives of convenience,—partly choice,—partly accident,—induced me to provide myself with a house in town.

French women, whose sayings seldom evince much delicacy of sentiment, assert that the perfection of female happiness would be to be born a widow. These lax talkers must certainly have in view a widowhood such as

mine,—healthy, wealthy, and uncontrolled. I had nothing to do but be happy in my own way. But to preserve that way my own, Love was to be excluded from my comfortable mansion in May Fair. As a nun is said to espouse the cloister on quitting the world, *I* resolved to espouse the world in quitting my solitude. With no intention, however, of becoming a submissive wife. My temper was now a little domineering; and I resolved to acquire great influence over my new partner. It was something, at least, that I could throw myself into its arms without a feeling of bitterness. The wound arising from disappointed affections inflicts a permanent scar on the character; and, as a peevish fretful bride, I might have failed to obtain the ascendancy I coveted. But my happiness had been as complete as sublunary happiness can be. I had no quarrel with society;—no wrongs to avenge upon the world.

Philosophy too came to my aid. I discovered that, even when a plant has shed its bloom, the foliage may be worth preserving. Nature, which provides us with a progressive digestion for every succession of aliment between infancy and old age, provides us also with varying capacities for happiness; and the childhood, which is “pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw,” becomes, after “a youth of folly, an old age of cards.” When young, we despise dowagerly enjoyments. But with dowagerhood, comes the love of scandal, toadies, and lap-dogs; and I gradually found myself enamoured of a blue macaw and an elegiac preacher. Ten years later, I frequented the Lock Chapel; and took my airings in the Regent’s Park!—

On first settling in London, a few of my friends of former days remained to welcome me;—the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, the Melbournes, Robert Spencer, and others. With St. Anne’s Hill, even in my utmost seclusion, I had kept up continual intercourse; and it was now more delightful than ever to steal a few days’ respite from the tumult of the metropolis, and enjoy with the best of men the beauties of the sequestered scene to which he was so much attached. Fox was too devoted a husband to admit of any misconstruction of the motives

which drew me to his side ; and often, when Mrs. Fox saw us return together from the favourite tree beneath whose shade it was his delight to watch the animated course of the Thames, she discerned in a moment from my reddened eyelids, that we had been dwelling together upon the past, and cherishing the precious memory of those who had been dear to both.

One day, soon after the proclamation of the peace or rather truce of Amiens, I was surprised in Stanhope Street by a visit from my illustrious friend, who found me musing over Madame Cottin's last novel.

“ Come, come,” cried he, “ my dear Lady Rawborne ! Lay aside these phantoms of the brain, and study human nature. Men and women are best in the original. An excellent opportunity presents itself. Mrs. Fox and I are off for the Continent, where I am anxious to examine the archives of Paris, for my Stuart History. There are precious documents, perhaps still recoverable, which were stolen during the revolution from the Scotch College.”

“ Do not attempt to deceive me with such shallow pretexts,” said I, laughing. “ You want to inhale in the republican capital, the incense likely to be burnt before the Champion of Liberty. You care as little as I do for your imbecile James and his intrigues.”

“ I care, at least, for my nephew Holland, whom I am to meet there. Lord Robert and Hare too will be in Paris in the autumn, and St. John accompanies us. Our tour commences with Holland. Come ! exert yourself. — You are just the person to plead at the consular court, with all the eloquence of beauty and high breeding, the fallen cause of aristocracy.”

“ No need of all these flatteries !” I replied. “ The first person you meet in Paris will be your faithful humble servant.”

This promise, I fulfilled. I was in waiting at the Hotel de Richelieu, when Mr. and Mrs. Fox arrived, in the month of August ; after receiving in their progress through France the homage, I might almost say adulation, of all classes of society. For, the worship I had formerly seen offered up in London to my friend, was nothing, compared with that which awaited him on the

Continent. The proverb that no man is a prophet in his own country, was fully exemplified in Fox. In England, he was esteemed an able statesman. But the public rarely think much of a statesman with whom the state can dispense. In Paris, he was idolised as a demi-god. Military serenades, deputations, civic festivals, greeted him in the provinces: and in the capital, he was followed in promenades, applauded in theatres, caressed in society, cheered by the people, flattered by the government. His air, his dress, his very infirmities were imitated. Everything was “*à la Fox!*”—the strongest evidence of Parisian enthusiasm! for were a prophet really to descend among them, their hats and cutlets would instantly be named “*à la Moïse*,” or “*à la Mahomet*.”

He bore his honours with the total absence of charlatanism which distinguished his sterling and truly English character. Aided by Mr. Adair, he pursued his researches in the ably organised Hotel des Archives; or visited the environs; or suffered Madame Recamier to drag him off for exhibition in some public promenade.

“We must be seen together,” she used to exclaim. “Before you came, *I* was the lion in fashion; and for worlds I would not have people suppose me jealous of my rival.”

My own curiosity, meanwhile, was eagerly excited by the first aspect of a city which, for the last ten years, had so engrossed the attention of Europe. How short a time had elapsed since the arrival of every post brought tidings which caused us to thrill with terror! So powerful, indeed, and still so vivid, were the impressions created by the frightful epoch of the Revolution, that we fancied the blood was scarcely yet dried up, which had deluged the devoted city. The Abbaye,—the Conciergerie,—the Temple,—the Guillotine, were names retaining all their fearful associations; and a few days after my arrival, I visited the Place de Louis XV. and the Cimetière de la Madeleine, prepared for profound emotions.

But I little knew Paris,—I little knew the French. Already, all was obliterated,—all forgotten!—A few glorious battles had withdrawn every particle of interest from the national tragedy; and the only wounds left

bleeding from the wounds of the Reign of Terror, were concealed by the embroidered uniforms and tricoloured scarves, besetting the levees of the First Consul.

With respect to the *coup d'œil* of Republican institutions promised me by Fox, if levity had effaced the terrible trophies of the Revolution, courtiership was beginning to re-regalise the desecrated palace of the Bourbons. Amid the Brutus heads, and Agrippina tunics of the new court, the leaven of chamberlainship and ladyship-of-the-bedchamber, was rapidly rising.

There were hosts of English in Paris. We formed a showy *corps d'élite* of the fine and fanciful ; and as every little congregation of fashion must have its idolatry and its infidelity, our *clique* soon divided itself into Bonapartists and Anti-Bonapartists. I could not exactly discover what part the latter faction, (among whom were a few furious Bourbonists,) came to play, just then, in Paris. Perhaps to seek the excitement of disgust, in preference to the lassitude of ennui ; just as others affected to applaud the combination of togas and top-boots ; or raved of Athenian tunics, bare arms, wet drapery, and Madame Recamier.

I was inclined to judge all I saw with rigid impartiality. The campaigns of Italy, as compared with our own recent pigtail-and-pipeclay soldiership in Holland, had kindled my enthusiasm in favour of the young Cæsar, whose three-cornered hat was soon to be as well-recognised an emblem of glory as the laurels of many an ancient victor ; and having letters of introduction to Madame Bonaparte, from persons who, having adored her as the wife of a legitimate Viscount, detested her as the Calphurnia of the First Consul, my application for an audience was promptly accorded.

Some saints are elevated to martyrdom by their virtues ; some, by their opportunities. Joséphine is one to whom public infatuation has opened a niche in the Kalendar. I saw her near and familiarly. My whole life has been spent among the vain and artificial ; and among the vainest and *most* artificial, was the Ex-empress. Neither “*artificial*” nor “*artful*,” however, conveys my exact meaning. *Artificieuse* is what I would express. Her graciousness, so much lauded, was a grimace ; her elegance,

of the most frivolous nature. Her charities consisted in a profuse distribution of the money of the nation; and so far from being just, either before or after she was generous, honesty was a virtue so foreign to her system, as frequently to expose her to the rebukes of her more equitable husband.

Joséphine was, in short, the personification of the old Faubourg St. Germain,—ignorant, dissolute, fickle, vain, unprincipled; but a proficient in that art of pleasing, which addresses itself to two of the most pitiful tendencies of human nature,—vanity and self-interest. She gave largely, she flattered profusely; and the world, instead of admiring the forbearance of Napoleon in supporting her so long as his partner, reviled him as an ingrate when he put her away. All the wives in Europe took part with the suffering wife, who fainted so despairingly at the prospect of losing the Imperial crown; overlooking the culpable levities, by the report of which, in Egypt, the young general was nearly deprived of his reason; and by the sight of which, in Italy, he was again driven to distraction. It is a lesson to those who overlook the advantages of amiability, that even to this day, the *prestige* created by the graciousness of Joséphine still survives.

The French adduce Napoleon's desertion of her as the first signal of his decadence,—without perceiving that the same epoch sealed the Emperor's ruinous connection with the House of Austria; and stoop to lament the untimely death of one, whom the records of her little court at Navarre describe as receiving with peals of laughter an account of the dimensions of the Duchess of Angoulême's bonnet, and the clumsiness of Louis XVIII.'s gout; at the moment the Allies were setting their triumphant foot on the neck of Napoleon!—

At the period of my visit to Paris, however, Joséphine was known rather by her levities as Madame Beauharnais, than by her graces as Madame Bonaparte. There could not be a plainer proof that the circle of the Tuileries was gradually forming itself into courtiership, than that the *minauderies* of a woman, who, in attempting to conceal the blemishes of her front teeth, had acquired an habitual smile, were beginning to find imitators. When the wife of the First Consul appeared in public, ornamented with

a splendid cameo borrowed from the National Museum, the belles of Paris began to ruin themselves by the purchase of antique gems; and after a tunic of filmy Indian muslin had been assumed by Madame Bonaparte in emulation of her discarded friend Madame Tallien, not all the Consular decrees could restrict them to the produce of the looms of Lyons. A throne was rising unnoticed under the Consular government, as a scaffold had risen unnoticed during the ascendancy of royalty.

The emotion betrayed by the First Consul at his first interview with Fox, is now as well known as his ignorance of the very name of Lord Erskine; and the precedence assigned to the family of Charles James Fox over the Duchess of Gordon and her daughter, was a public homage of the most memorable kind.

One among the many high qualities I recognised in the First Consul has been denied him by his enemies, and not sufficiently vindicated by his friends; I mean *his goodness of heart*. A political execution forced upon his concurrence by a master-spirit of evil, has affixed so vile a stigma on his character, that it has been made an article of religion to anathematise him under the name of the “assassin of the Duc d’Enghien.” Political animosities apart, however, I have no hesitation in asserting the humanity of Napoleon’s disposition. A good son to an imperious mother,—a good brother to men who endangered his sceptre by their intrigues, and sisters who dishonoured him by gallantry and prodigality,—an indulgent husband to a profuse and faithless wife, an uxorious one to the mother of the child he adored,—Napoleon was indulgent with his step-children, equitable with his household, affectionate almost to weakness with his brothers in arms. *His goodness* was twice as genuine as that of Joséphine. Sagacious as he was, *his goodness* often rendered him a dupe. One might as well pronounce Nelson a hard-hearted man from his having permitted the execution of Caraccioli, as write down Bonaparte a monster for having been misled into sanctioning that of the Duc d’Enghien.

“Ten years hence,” said one of the shrewdest of our English lordlings, to the Luynes, Chevreuses, Noailles, and Rohans, who still receded from democratic contact,

“I promise you as thriving a batch of Dukes, Duchesses, and Chamberlains, manufactured out of what you so cavalierly designate *canaille*, as you would wish to see. You are all courtiers at heart,—yes, *all*:—and verily your molten calf will speedily be set up.”

“And can this,” said I, gazing on the splendid restoration of the Carrousel, as I proceeded with the Foxes to a fête given to them by Madame Recamier, at her villa at Clichy, “can this be the Paris of Mirabeau and Robespierre? —Scarcely ten years ago, one expected to find the city buried under human bones, like Pompeii under its ashes; and already, how resplendently it shines forth!”

“Let the dead bury their dead!” replied my friend, gravely. “Would you have the French Government leave incomplete the fine line of Boulevarts we are traversing, because the Cimetière de la Madeleine lies at one extremity, and the ruins of the Bastille at the other?”

“I have nothing to say against the Consular legislation,” said I. “I admire the alacrity which forwards its public works and foreign conquests, and reverence the feeling which has restored its altars—”

“*That* was inevitable; since even the arch-priest of its infidelity admitted that ‘*Si Dieu n’existe pas, il faudrait l’inventer!*’”

“—But I can *not* comprehend that, with the Abbaye still standing, and the guillotine at all hours ready for re-erection, the ambition of these officials should aspire to crowns and coronets!”

“I give them five years to make their Consul a King; —nay, who knows, (for they have lost time to make up in courtiership,) perhaps an Emperor!”

“Like the sculptor in the fable, who, having carved a Jupiter out of a block, knelt down, and adored it as a divinity. In the present case, perhaps, a divine spark may have pre-existed in the marble.”

“The spark of Genius! And the marble itself is only of too fine a grain for the thing into which they would degrade it.”

In spite, however, of the attentions paid to Fox by the First Consul, in spite of the flattery of the fair and gay, the cajolements of the Recamier, and the persecutions of

David and other artists, who coolly requested him to desophisticate himself to a state even more natural than that of “poor Tom,” that they might model his person for a statue, my illustrious friend devoted his mornings to the Hotel des Archives, studying and taking notes. In vain I strove to divert his notice from the musty records of an obsolete dynasty, to the curious extravagancies of human nature passing around us; such as the romantic passions of the *grandes dames* of our society for ex-bishops, and even cardinals,—the overstrained enthusiasm affected by others for the oracular tone of the Premier Consul,—and the jealousy with which their mines were countermined by the household of Joséphine.

Before winter set in, Parliament and fox-hunting thinned the ranks of the English. Fox was among the first to depart; and, with few exceptions, those that remained belonged to the commercial class; so that when at length the precipitate declaration of hostilities, and the sudden exit of Lord Whitworth, placed eleven thousand of my loving country-people at the mercy of Bonaparte’s, or rather Talleyrand’s bad faith, the French were disappointed, on hauling up the net, to perceive that their prey consisted of what La Fontaine calls the “*menu fretin!*”

The larger fishes had broken through in haste, and swum across the Channel; and when I found myself once more safe in Stanhope Street, and learned that the Yarmouths and a few others of our set were *netted*, I could scarcely be grateful enough for the anxious letters from St. Anne’s Hill, which, forewarning me of my danger, had recalled my truant steps to my native country.



CHAPTER XLI.

THE Pitt-star was now raging again.—“Havock!” was once more the cry. The fires smouldering in their embers were fanned into redoubled fury by a diplomatic breeze, and “the dogs of war let slip.”

It was a curious crisis.—The national excitement I have seen produced in these latter days by measures of constitutional policy, was then invested in the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war. The gathering cry of “invasion,” once raised, was echoed by millions of tongues; and *“la raison avec son petit filet de voix”* became inaudible. Talleyrand, the ablest guesser in Europe, had so admirably conjectured the character of the English, as to know that their attention would be absorbed by the clang of arms, “and busy hammers closing rivets up,” as a swarm of bees is fascinated by the clashing of a warming-pan; and while we scuffled away to build our martello towers, sink our military canals, and present colours to our loyal volunteers, the ex-bishop and ex-lieutenant of artillery perfected, unmolested, their plans of continental subjection.

The English are not essentially a military nation. The insulated position which so auspiciously secures us from wanton attack, relieves us also from the instincts engendered by centuries of self-defence. The Poles were said aforetime to be born on horseback. The Hungarians, incessantly harassed by their barbarian neighbours, assumed for daily use a national costume, that admitted of vaulting at any time into the saddle for a skirmish. But the English, strong in self-security, have glued themselves to their beams, treddles, and cutlers’ wheels; unagitated by the swash-buckler valour which picks a quarrel with its neighbour, in hopes that, in the course of it, something may turn up worth fighting for. They have no ardour for gratuitous quarrels. They do not fire up like a turkey-cock, or a Frenchman, at sight of a red rag. The cause must be a good one that draws them from their fire-sides. But, once astir, they return not till justice has been done, and the sword can be replaced with honour to the scabbard.

With the exception of the Eastern and Egyptian campaigns, to the heroism of which the populace was never very keenly alive, more than half a century had elapsed since a land victory accredited our soldiership. We seemed to have adopted an opinion, that national quarrels are best decided by those grand national duels

called naval engagements. The sea was just then John Bull's favourite field of battle; where the trace of carnage is sooner effaced, and the honour obtained more positive. It became necessary, however, to inspire the nation with enlarged views of heroism. In order to wake the hundred-handed Briareus from his slumber, it was indispensable for Government to make believe to believe in the make-believe demonstrations of Talleyrand!

“The country is threatened with invasion!” cried the Ministers.—“Nonsense!” replied the Country.—“Oh! monstrous unbelief!” rejoined Pitt and Lord Hawkesbury. “If you won't take upon our showing the Spanish fleet you cannot see, because 'tis not in sight,—if you have no faith in the flotilla of flat-bottomed boats in Boulogne Harbour,—believe, at least, in our own martello towers,—our Volunteer-consolidation bill,—our Additional Force bill; or the First Consul and his troops will be at Canterbury before you have furnished your canteens with milk-and-water. Nay,—for his soldiers, like those of Lear, are shod with felt,—it would not surprise us to find them encamped on Shooter's Hill, while you are frivo-losely perplexing us with insurrections in Ireland and Anti-slavery petitions.—Cheapside is in danger;—Cornhill is shaking on its basis.—Look to the Bank, John.—Look at home!”

John laughed.—He was reminded that Hanover was gone.—“Joy go with it!” was his reply. “You have secured the state stud and silver tables and chairs of Herrenhausen. As to the rest, what is it but the defalcation of a lubberly school-boy, whose pocket-money came out of our purse, and who did us no earthly credit?”

John Bull refused, in short, to be frightened out of his wits.

An appeal was next made to his generosity; and *that* weak point in his heart was readily touched. When reminded of the cruel position of the English *détenu*s in France, “their unfortunate countrymen languishing in the power of monsters who poisoned the sick at Jaffa, and were perpetrating barbarities without name on the blacks of St. Domingo,” John Bull laughed no longer. He would not have his fellow-countrymen treated like

niggers or poisoned like frog-eating Frenchmen. He would sing God save the King, and become a loyal volunteer!

The spirit thus roused, it was easy to maintain. Dibdin was salaried to write patriotic songs,—Astley's to put forth national melodramas. Every sign of every alehouse assumed a military attitude. Recent annals could furnish little in the way of sign-posts. Rodney or Nelson, Howe or Hood, were not just then to the purpose; and for want of a newer Cæsar, the bald pate of the Marquis of Granby, or the three-cornered hat of the Duke of Cumberland, was re-varnished to preside over the potations of an undaunted militia. Volumes might have been perpetuated out of the harangues made by the new colonels to their new corps. Wormwood Scrubbs were scarcely wide enough for the marchings and counter-marchings of the Bloomsbury with their yellow facings, and the St. James's with their blue; and Hyde Park was worn grass-bare, by the caracolings of the Light Horse Volunteers. Even Lord's cricket-ground seemed ambitious of substituting cannon for cricket balls; so often were the centurions of Mary-le-bone gathered within its palings, to receive colours, and give pop-gun note of preparation.

The cause was consecrated by the enthusiasm of royalty itself. The Duke of Clarence enrolled himself in the Teddington Volunteers, on whom the Prince of Wales bestowed their Spital-field banners of glory; while the Prince, debarred by the twaddling interference of Mr. Addington from the military command of which he was ambitious, and which he was qualified to assume, repaired one fine summer day to Brighton, to the head of his regiment of Hussars, in defiance of the assurance of His Majesty's Ministers that it would be far safer for him to remain in Pall Mall.

The spark thus blown into a flame, patriotism became your only wear! The Volunteers were the fashion. The populace, in hourly expectation of seeing Bonaparte overcome them, like a summer cloud, suspended over the metropolis on a fiery dragon, thought, like the Chinese, to drive away the evil spirit by a perpetual drumming of drums. The Seven Dials were ready to fight like lions

for what Dibdin called “the tight little island ;” while the second gallery of the Circus nightly chorussed the song of “A rope’s end for grim Bonyparty.”—An acorn was rapidly germinating, which grew and grew, till all the nations of Europe took refuge under shelter of the Oak.

The spirit illegitimately evoked, soon found legitimate objects for its fervour ; and the invasion-panic, which diverted the eyes of England from the ambitious prospects of the new Emperor on Prussia and Austria, fortunately served to consolidate the forces which eventually found a mighty leader in Wellington, and a new Agincourt at Waterloo.

But all this was in embryo. We were still divided between our terror of the tricoloured flag being planted on Rochester Bridge, and our appetite for peace ; and it has since sometimes occurred to me, when waging the polite war of whist with His Excellency Prince Talleyrand, in some dowager coterie, how often his inward man must have laughed, (for his outward, Heaven knows, is little subject to cachinnation !) when contemplating of late years the gigantic force of England and its metropolis ; and remembering that his camp and flotilla had power to agitate the nerves of the great man-mountain, who had only to burst his Lilliputian bondage and overset them by the neighing of his war-horse.

My own tendencies were, I own, strictly pacific. The sentence of Mr. Fox was for peace : a genuine philanthropist—(nay, why not lover of his fellow-creatures, for, as De Ligne observes, what need of a heathen word to express the first of Christian precepts ?) his opinion gave the law to mine.

Our summer, however, was certainly enlivened by the epidemic heroism which dotted every heath with tents, and set up barracks like mile-stones. Bagshot, Hounslow, Coxheath, Warley, and other arid regions prolific of late years only of footpads, and in former of highwaymen, had each its Brigades and Brigadiers. As much pipeclay was sold in England within twelve months of the declaration of hostilities, as had served the vast armies of the Holy Roman Empire during the thirty years’ war.

Undismayed by the drums and fifes of Bagshot, I hired

a small place at Sunning Hill, to be within reach of St. Anne's and Fitzpatrick, and at no great distance from town. The health of my own and Fitzirnham's friend was greatly impaired. Hare, our companion in Paris, and the pleasantest and most cheerful of mankind, was no more; and the witty Bishop of Down, too, was gone. But I felt that a mightier loss was to follow. The next few years were likely to weigh like a century on the head of Fox.—Either he would be called to office, and expire under the press of public business; or, in the misfortunes of the country under a ruinous administration, find a more ignominious death-blow.

All seemed going amiss. Independent of the critical position of public affairs, the aspect of the Royal Family was most dispiriting. The health of the King, shaken by domestic afflictions of the most painful kind, as well as by the troubles of Ireland and the menacing attitude of the Continent, was again a matter of national intercession with the great Disposer of events. The Prince of Wales was totally estranged from public life and the society of his political associates; while the Princess was indulging, in her public privacy at Charlton, in coarse and unbecoming levities.

By all this, St. James's was divided against itself; and there was even a break in London society. The worst taste prevailed. A flashy tone of barouche-driving and disreputable gallantry, a remote echo of the earlier libertinism of the Prince, discredited those classes which, by their passion for *éclat* and glaring frivolity, are always most prominent in the eyes of the vulgar.

Never did I find London so vapid as on the season succeeding my return. There was such want of energy in everybody,—such a terror of innovation,—such a dread that, if the pigtails of the Horse Guards were abridged, or the hoops of the Court ladies abolished, the world might move too fast, and perform its gyration within the twenty-four hours!—What is now termed Conservatism, was then first formed into a creed; and unluckily, wit enlisted itself on the stand-still side. Canning and the Anti-Jacobin were doing for Politics what the Quarterly Review soon afterwards effected for Literature. The

grand charm of the State Prospero was the creation of a circle in which every one was reduced to catalepsy. Even irregularity was obliged to *look* regular ; and Pitt drank his bottle or bottles of port *per diem*, as gravely as a judge.

“ You do not perceive,” Fox used to say to me, after smiling away my murmurs against the routine of English society, “ that, living in a land of machinery,—of wheels and cylinders, levers and pulleys,—we have gradually assimilated ourselves to these sources of national prosperity. At all events, console yourself by the certainty that English nature has need of such restraints. Never was there a greater error of judgment than that which first proclaimed us a phlegmatic nation. Were *we* to indulge in the aberrations of the French, earth would not bound our monstrous irregularities. We put too much heart into all we say and do. *We* are in earnest. *Our* susceptibility is not skin-deep. I never desire to see an Englishman break bounds.”

The truth of these remarks did not render them more palatable. A few days afterwards, they received sad confirmation in the death of Lord Camelford. The same intemperance which brought both him and Colonel Montgomery to the grave, would have ended in a fencing-bout at Paris. Fox was right ; an Englishman will not bear to be emancipated from the influence of routine, or the ponderous machinery (moral code playing into moral code) with which he has laboured to strengthen the restrictive power of his own centre of gravity.

But it is time I should recur to my own family. I had outlived both my younger sisters, and Lord Ailesfort was even estranged by a second marriage. Sir Henry Mordaunt occupied, during Mr. Addington’s administration, a post of some eminence, and during my husband’s lifetime, an intimacy between them had been checked by political discords. We moved in different societies ; and our intercourse at length degenerated into a few dinner-parties in town, and a careless week or two spent together at Spetchingley or Rawborne Hall, in the course of the year.

After the death of her daughter Helena, which took place a few weeks after my second marriage, the Duchess re-appeared no more in society. Lady Isabella was for-

tunately removed to a happier home, by an appointment as lady of the bedchamber to one of the Princesses, whom she has never quitted. Over the last years of her unfortunate mother, and her repentant but fearful death-bed, it becomes a surviving relative to draw the veil !

As regards my own dowagerhood, though I knew my coterie in Stanhope Street to be stigmatised as an ark-like miscellany, I occupied too elevated a place in society to cringe to its tyranny. The words "*mauvais genre*"—"bad set," or "*shocking company*"—had no terrors for my ear. Whom I liked, I liked,—whom I chose to see, I saw; for "*whom I love*," (to borrow the words of Coleridge,) "*I love indeed!*"

Without the fear of the fashion-master before my eyes, authors, artists, actors, became my frequent guests. I gave up going to Court; and all I had to consult in the choice of my society, was my own satisfaction. Fain would I consecrate a page or two of these Memoirs to a few of those who served to brighten my solitude. Romilly, Whitbread, Windham, Curran, Grattan, Matt. Lewis, William Spencer;—Tom Sheridan, that most buoyant and fascinating of human beings;—Frank Lord Guildford, Jeffrey, Jekyll, Sydney Smith, Moore and Rogers, the Berry sisters, Lady Cork and Lady Charlotte Lindsay;—Mrs. Inchbald, whom I sometimes beguiled from her penurious solitude, and Mrs. Weddell, from her golden one;—Mrs. Siddons, Kemble, Lawrence,—with fifty other talented and charming persons, of less renown but scarcely inferior merit.

After the fashion of foreign countries, I attempted to give weekly parties. But the thing was a failure. The English are not of a conversational temperament. Except on the chapter of Politics, we cannot turn our minds inside out for the amusement of the first comer. In talking to an Englishman, his countenance indicates that he has an unexpressed *arrière pensée*,—usually his best, which he keeps for his bosom friend, his wife, his mistress, or himself.—He seldom bestows it on society.

I found, indeed, that those who really pleased me, and whom I wished to please, would not so much as enter my drawing-room on the nights set apart for weekly society.

I therefore dropped the attempt; restricting myself to dinner-parties; and mine was perhaps the only table in London which politics did not just then convert into an arena of loud and graceless contention. For I plead guilty to the narrowness of my soul: I never *did* invite a Pittite within my doors! Even Canning, by whose brilliancy I was fascinated, did not seduce me into extending my circle for the reception of a man in many respects so liberal, but in more than one, the bitter opponent of my friends.

It must be owned that politics formed just then a superstition, of which the votaries were scarcely less frantic in their excesses, than the devotees of some Eastern faith. Men wrangled and drank, and drank and wrangled, almost as vehemently as in the era of “Wilkes and Liberty.” Peace or War stood in place of Whig or Tory; and while Napoleon went conquering on, unimpeded even by his own dignities, Europe suffered its royal lambs to be carried off, one by one, by the Imperial Eagle!—

At length, maugre Port wine and its potent influence, even wrangling, even argument, was hushed into solemn silence. Austerlitz was fought, and with Austerlitz came the death of one whom the world, whatever might be its verdict upon his principles as a statesman, was compelled to number among its illustrations.—William Pitt died early in the winter of 1806; a man of exemplary integrity and powerful faculties; and the depression of the public mind, over which, only a few weeks before, the august spectacle of the interment of our great naval warrior had cast a gloom, was thus grievously renewed.—Nelson and Pitt were gone!—According to the lines of Moore, “Star after star was decaying;”—and the evil days upon which we had fallen, or rather to which we had progressed, inspired the friends and adherents of Fox with apprehensions of a still more painful bereavement.

In the month of February, a crisis long foreseen placed at the head of the new ministry Lord Grenville and Charles James Fox; when a rainbow instantly expanded in the political sky. Peace and the name of Fox were inseparably connected in the mind of the nation. But a lapse of two-and-twenty years since he formed part of

his Majesty's councils, had created such more than chaotic confusion in our relations with the Continent, that the task of reconciling interests, far as the poles asunder, was likely to defy even the Herculean efforts of a mind so expansive. The question of the despairing Macduff, "Stands Scotland where it did?" might have been parodied by the native of many an European country; which, if not "almost ashamed to know itself," caused others to blush for its subjection. Still, the necessity for peace was imminent. The monstrous power of France, generated under the system of Pitt, seemed, like the dragon charmed by Jason, susceptible of being crushed only in inaction; and negotiations were accordingly commenced with the French minister for foreign affairs. But the good faith of Fox was not on the look out for pitfalls where an open territory courted his advance; and believing the other "high contracting party" to be progressing like himself in a right line, he found Talleyrand—no, the Prince de Benevento—at the extremity of a zigzag, when he himself had reached the goal. The name of Russia was used as a scape-goat; and the inexperience of Lord Yarmouth as a diplomatist, adduced by the French government as a plea for the protraction of the negotiation. But when the wary, hard-headed Lauderdale blundered over the same ground, it became evident to all the world as it had been from the first to myself, that Talleyrand had achieved his object in gaining time; while *we* had lost time, and gained nothing.

At Easter, when roaming with Fox in the shrubberies of St. Anne's, where, with the Albemarles and Fitzpatrick, I was passing the holidays, I predicted a continuance of the war, with all the laughing obstinacy which is a woman's substitute for argument; but I was stopped in a moment by the gravity of countenance with which *he*, formerly so playful, rebuked my levity. He bad me reflect on the interests of suffering humanity; and proved, by a few of those energetic phrases which fell from his lips like the bolt from the thunder-cloud, that his care for his own political triumph, on the occasion, was as a grain of sand weighed against the welfare of the people.

“Nay,” I remonstrated, “there is surely no such imminence in the case?—Pitt is gone, and you have time enough before you.”—

“*Time?*”—reiterated Fox, turning towards me a countenance of mingled majesty and sweetness. “Who shall say that he has time before him?—Pitt went in January. *I* may go in June!”

I attributed his despondency to the shock he had recently experienced by the death of his friend, the Duchess of Devonshire. But on referring to Mrs. Fox, she admitted that her husband was overtasking his strength, and that symptoms of latent disease were apparent. Scarcely had he returned to Stable Yard, (where the residence of the Duke of Bedford had been appropriated to his use during the absence of his Grace as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland,) when these symptoms took a still more decided turn. And soon, alas! the secret of Fox’s indisposition transpired to the public.

Ere it took that fatal form which struck despair into the hearts of all who loved him, a parliamentary triumph was reserved for him, which would suffice to inscribe his name in the Temple of Fame;—a triumph renounced by Pitt, but appreciated by his great political rival, less as a legislator than as a man. A pledge for the extinction of the Slave Trade, extorted from both houses of Parliament, called forth the last display of those oratorical powers which were never exercised save in the cause of benevolence and virtue.

From that period, though his mind withdrew not from the arbitration of public affairs, he retired almost entirely from the public eye. Lords Fitzwilliam, Grey, and Robert Spencer, General Fitzpatrick, and myself, were almost the only persons admitted to his presence, beyond the family circle, comprehending his wife, his nephew, and niece. The whole town came pressing to his door with inquiries. The Prince sent daily messages of the most anxious nature; but the irritating nature of Mr. Fox’s disease rendered quiet too indispensable to admit of visitors.

“I cannot talk to you,” murmured he one day, when I took a chair beside his sofa. “But I will think unre-

servedly in your presence;—a compliment secondary only to conversation."

A smile was upon his lips as he spoke. But those lips were now often livid,—often distorted by suffering.—Dropsy was one of the painful symptoms of his disease. He underwent an operation; and in the exhaustion which followed, new terrors presented themselves to our minds.

It was an admirable thing to behold, in every brief respite from pain, with what zeal this truly great man devoted himself to the regulation of those portions of public business which were likely to suffer by his estrangement from office; and how often, in paroxysms of pain, he strove to subdue the sense of torment by fixing his attention on favourite passages of classic authors, read aloud to him by his secretary or friends. Even myself he sometimes admitted to the happiness of administering to his amusement; and having acquired from Lord Rawborne a fluency in the Italian language, (far inferior, I admit, to that displayed by my auditor,) he would place Tasso, Ariosto, or Metastasio in my hands, and so eagerly follow the meaning of the poet, as often to rectify my blunders.

One day, when I unexpectedly entered the room where he sat reclining in his easy-chair, I discerned in a moment that his feelings had been excited by some unusual emotion.

"*Alone?*" said I,—vexed to find him thus left to his solitary meditations.

"By choice!" was his reply. "I have persuaded Mrs. Fox to take some air. Holland and his sister are gone home to dinner. I wanted to be alone."

"You do not feel worse?"—

He did not answer.

"What did Vaughan and Pitcairn say to you this morning?"—

"Assured me I was so much better, that I saw in a moment their opinion was unfavourable. I hastened, therefore, to perform a task which I felt would not bear procrastination."

Fancying he alluded to the settlement of his pecuniary affairs, I was silent.

“I have been to Holland House!” said he, perceiving that I forbore to question him. “I wished to see the old place once more, as the hare returns to her form. It was in great beauty,—just as I could have desired in bidding it farewell. Those favourite spots, endeared by so many boyish associations,—by recollections of my father—mother—brother!—” He paused. For many minutes he was silent; nor did I presume to interrupt his reverie. “Well!” murmured he at last, as if speaking to himself, “their ambition is fulfilled. I die at the post they wished to assign me.”

To divert his thoughts from these melancholy retrospections, I adverted to St. Anne’s, a name which possessed peculiar charm for the ear of its partial master; inquiring whether he did not think of removing thither so soon as his recovery from the effects of the operation would permit.

“Such is my earnest desire,” he replied. “But they will not hear of it. I shall be too far, they think, from medical advice. The Duke of Devonshire has kindly offered me Chiswick; and in a few days I shall be there.”

I thought the place ill-chosen. With all its beauty and interest, Chiswick was just then saddened to the mind of every friend of the lamented Georgiana. A spell of evil seemed to be over its walls: how soon, alas! to be attested by the death of Fox; and more recently, by the death of the only statesman who, from that period till the present, has obtained from the nation the designation of “great.”

CHAPTER XLII.

IT was at the end of July that Fox removed to the villa of the Duke of Devonshire; and there, a few days afterwards, I visited him, previous to my departure for Sunning Hill. Gladly as I would have remained in town to watch over the declining days of a friend so venerated, I had no pretext for aspiring to the privilege. With such

tender nurses as Mrs. Fox and his niece,—such filial attendance as that of Lord Holland,—and such companions as Lord Robert and Fitzpatrick, I could not presume to fancy myself in request.

Still less, after I had seen him installed at Chiswick. The excitement arising from change of air and scene effected wonders. He was able to move about again; and when I entered the saloon, of which the blinds were partially closed in consequence of the heat of the day, I found him contemplating the celebrated picture of "Belisarius," which adorns that cabinet of gems. It was impossible not to call to mind the scene recorded by the secretary of the renowned French Minister,—the all-potent Cardinal,—who was found, a few days prior to his death, wandering at day-break through his gorgeous galleries, and bidding a reluctant farewell to their glorious chef-d'œuvres of art. Of how different a nature was the interest displayed by Fox in similar objects;—not as being his property,—but from a sympathy between the poetry of *their* nature and his own!—

"I am better," said he, before I could inquire after his health,—for well did he know what feeling was strongest in my mind. "I have still, perhaps, some months to wear out the patience of my friends, and obstruct the march of public business."

From public business, however, he was now virtually disconnected. He had almost ceased to interest himself in the crab-like progress of Lord Lauderdale, who was still at Paris. For a quasi new ministry, under the tutelage of that man of method, Lord Grenville, was already taking measures of its own.

With neither Grenville nor Grey, had Fox, at *that* moment, much sympathy. With Sheridan, still less; for he saw him but once, after his own accession to power; and then, on terms of coldness and constraint. Most of his personal and political friends were dispersed for the summer. He was alone with his family and intimates.

I accompanied him that afternoon in a tour of the grounds, round which he was drawn in a garden-chair by a favourite servant; pausing, now and then, to point out to me some rare and beautiful flower; and more than once,

to advert to *her* by whom the spot had been favoured, and who occupied so high a place in our common affection.

“The kindest of human hearts!” was the expression of Fox, in referring to the late Duchess. “The best-bred woman in London!” had been the ejaculation of the Prince on learning her death:—in each, how characteristic an encomium!—

Had I imagined when, accompanied by Mrs. Fox, I sauntered beside the garden-chair round those green lawns and aromatic shrubberies, that I was looking on the majestic countenance of the feeble invalid for the last time, with what emotion should I have listened to every word that fell from his lips!—But the physicians announced no immediate danger. I promised myself shortly to return and assure myself personally of his progress; and after an hour or two of bald disjointed chat, took leave of him, wholly unwarned by those presentiments, which one sometimes fancies to have been premonitory of a last farewell.

“When do you go to Sunning?” he inquired, as he held my hand at parting. “I have a commission to give you for *my* part of the world.”

“To-morrow. Is there anything I can do for you?—Do you wish me to drive over to St. Anne’s?”—

He replied by an almost playful affirmative movement of the head. “I want you to say something civil for me to my roses,” said he. “I feel as if I had been faithless to St. Anne’s, in coming hither. But St. Anne’s must remember that it was not the minister who forsook it,—but the dying man!” And in a low voice, whose inflexion I shall never forget, he repeated to me the lines addressed by Tasso, in prison, to a brother poet:—

“Tu, che ne vai in Pindo,
Ove pende mia etra ad un cipresso,—
Salutala in mio nome, e dille poi
Ch’ fo son dagli anni e da fortuna oppressa!”

I promised to do his spiriting as gently as its nature seemed to demand; and on my arrival at home, did indeed drive over, one melancholy morning, to St. Anne’s. It was a heavy sultry day. The roses, to which he had addressed those plaintive adieus, had already shed their

summer bloom. The grass was parched in the pastures. All was sad—all withered.—The place seemed conscious that the master-spirit was passing away.

And on my return home from that drive, I was summoned to Spetchingley, by an earnest letter from Clara, acquainting me with the dangerous illness of my brother. His disorder, a typhus fever, threatened a duration that demanded my aid in nursing him. I went, without hesitation. It was only fitting that at an epoch of general desolation, when the death-bell of the great and glorious was never silent, I should have nothing before my eyes but sights of terror and affliction. Harry was insensible when I arrived ;—remained many days insensible,—many days in hopeless danger ; and while that misery continued, I had no thought to bestow elsewhere. When my brother was pronounced out of danger, and I recovered sufficiently to examine the newspapers, I found the state of Mr. Fox announced as progressively worse. A second operation was contemplated.

I now perceived the improbability that I should behold again, on this side the grave, the august friend of Fitzirnham, the revered of my own soul ; and wept in bitter self-recrimination that I had not hallowed to myself, by some warmer endearment, our parting interview. Like Michael Angelo grieving after his last interview with Vittoria Colonna, I reproached myself with coldness. I wrote to his secretary,—I wrote to Mrs. Fox.—But alas ! so many were the claimants for intelligence from every quarter of the kingdom, that only a few lines served to confirm my worst apprehensions. The operation had produced no permanent benefit. Lord Holland and General Fitzpatrick had taken up their abode at Chiswick.—The last hour was at hand.

Still, during his intervals of anguish, his cheerfulness returned. He loved to be read to—talked to.—He loved to look on the faces still so dear to him; though often averted, lest he should read in their sadness his sentence of condemnation.

My brother, meanwhile, supported by the force of a constitution unbroken by excess, was rapidly recovering ; and great as was the diversity of their political opinions,

it is impossible to describe with what interest he daily questioned me concerning the state of things at Chiswick.

“God preserve him!—The country cannot in its present crisis do without him!”—was the adjuration of one who justly anticipated the diversity of councils about to follow his removal.

“I trust it will not be long, my dear Lady Rawborne, before you are able to dispose of your time,” wrote General Fitzpatrick, a few days after this. “Our friend has more than once expressed a wish to see you; and the wishes he has to express upon earth, are already numbered.—Vaughan admits that we have not many days to keep him with us.”

The swollen eyes with which I visited my brother after the perusal of this grievous announcement, apprised him that something was amiss; and on learning the fact, Henry insisted that, without a moment’s delay, I should set off to town. With a heavy heart, I complied; and early the next day reached London. Within a few miles of town, I passed the Prince of Wales, in an open carriage, on his way, as I afterwards found, to Lord Stafford’s, at Trentham; and at the rapid pace he was proceeding, did not expect to be recognised. To my surprise, however, (for we had not met since the fête at Stowe, three years before,) his Royal Highness ordered the carriages to stop; and, as if aware that a single topic at that moment engaged the minds of both, informed me that the consultation of physicians at Chiswick had tried a new medicine, the digitalis, often used in cases of dropsy; that the effect was most disastrous; that our beloved friend had barely existed through the preceding night, and could not survive the day!

I trembled too much even to reply; and I proceeded at once to Chiswick.—It was the 13th of September, the ever lamentable 13th of September!—As I drove through Hyde Park, at that season deserted, I heard the Tower guns firing, and cared not to inquire for what. The capture of Buenos Ayres was nothing to *me*!—All I desired was to reach Chiswick!—

On turning to the road leading towards the Burlington Villa, a silent crowd evidently collected by the apprehen-

sion of some mighty calamity, rendered it difficult for the carriage to proceed. Other carriages, too, formed a line towards the house ; and when at last I attained the gates, I noticed the liveries of Lord Fitzwilliam, the Spencers, and all the intimate friends of Fox, in attendance on the carriages drawn up.

I alighted, and entered the lodge on foot. The porter's wife was weeping too bitterly to take heed of me. The first person I saw in the grounds was Lord Fitzwilliam, pacing up and down with his eyes fixed upon the ground, under the shade of the very tree beneath which I had taken leave of our beloved friend.—I saw how it was.—That devoted friend had not courage to witness the afflicting scene passing within doors !

In another moment, I saw a gentleman (Mr. Allen, if I remember) approach, and whisper a few words to Lord Fitzwilliam ; who staggered, and would have fallen, had he not been supported by his companion.

I rushed to the house. Not a servant was visible,—not a sound audible.—Everything seemed paralysed by the dread event of the day.—Hastening towards the room previously pointed out to me by Mrs. Fox as that of her husband, I found the door slightly ajar. The broken-hearted wife and niece had been that moment led from the chamber of death by his medical attendants ; and Trotter, the Irish secretary of Fox, stood alone by the bedside, while a servant was closing the shutters against the fading sunshine of an autumnal evening.—All was over !

I seem to see it now !—The tent-bed with its coverlid of pale green silk ; above which was the immortalised countenance of one of the first of mortals. The breath appeared to have exhaled in a placid sigh from his scarcely-parted lips ; and the glorious expression of his face proclaimed that Charles James Fox died, as he had lived, full of resignation to the Almighty,—full of peace and goodwill towards mankind.—

* * * * *

A few weeks more, and the muffled bell of Westminster Abbey proclaimed that its portals were unclosed

to welcome another of the great and glorious to its star-crowned caverns. Beside those of his great rival in renown, the remains of Fox were laid to rest.—Peace, peace be with his ashes!—

A great multitude filled the aisles and avenues of the church. The whole kingdom bewailed him, not only as the noblest Roman of them all, but as the last.

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Thus ends the first portion of my Memoirs. A time may come, hereafter, for the publication of their concluding pages.

THE END.



